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Political Party Learning in the European Free Alliance: Inspiration and Information in the (Trans)Nationalist Family

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, Judith Sijstermans, and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. I declare that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Judith Sijstermans
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Abstract

Recent years, and high-profile events such as the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and 2017 Catalan referendum, have shown that stateless nationalist and regionalist political parties remain relevant political forces in European politics. Scholars have long studied these political parties comparatively, but autonomist movements have not developed in a vacuum. This thesis explores the interconnectedness of nationalist and regionalist parties. Relationships between these parties can most tangibly be traced through taking the European political party of the European Free Alliance (EFA) as a starting point. Stateless regionalist and nationalist political parties have coalesced under EFA as their transnational political party for more than 35 years.

This thesis seeks to understand how relationships between EFA member parties affect them. In particular, I focus on one possible consequence: learning. I ask, do interactions between regionalist and nationalist parties in the European Free Alliance generate member party learning? If so, why and how? If not, why not? In order to explore learning, I first develop a political party learning framework. This framework builds on existing approaches to political parties, transnational political parties, and policy and organisational learning literatures. I propose three stages of learning: information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation. I also identify five contextual factors that might condition party learning: electoral success, governing responsibility, party centralization, key entrepreneurs, and issue contestation.

I apply this party learning framework to four EFA member parties: the Frisian National Party, the Union Démocratique Bretonne, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, and the Scottish National Party. These cases studies are constructed predominantly through elite interviews, complemented by ethnographic observation, and documentary analysis. I find that some political

parties in EFA do learn from their interactions with other member parties. Learning occurs on issues ranging from technical renewable energy solutions to altered electoral strategies. I also identify cases of non-learning and stalled learning. The most influential factors determining patterns of party learning are electoral success, party centralization, and institutional access.

Lay Summary

Sub-state nationalist and regionalist parties are political parties that mobilize around issues of territorial autonomy and representation within the state. Europe's nationalist and regionalist parties range from parties seeking full independence to those seeking to protect a regional language or culture. These parties coalesce in the European Parliament under a European political party: the European Free Alliance (EFA).

Under the auspices of EFA, nationalist and regionalist parties interact at multilateral events, through virtual means, and in bilateral meetings. This thesis explores one consequence of these interactions: learning. I ask: do member parties of EFA learn from their interactions with one another? If so, why and how? If not, why not? I have developed a theoretical framework to study political party learning. This framework considers that political party learning is best studied as a *process*. The proposed party learning process would follow three stages: information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation.

To test my proposed political party learning framework, I chose four EFA member parties: the Frisian National Party, the Union Démocratique Bretonne, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, and the Scottish National Party. These parties are studied through elite interviews, observation of EFA events, and analysis of relevant documents.

I find that political parties in EFA do learn from other member parties, on policy issues ranging from environmental sustainability to electoral strategies. Learning is often driven by parties' efforts to expand their policy platforms or achieve more electoral success. However, some parties do not learn, and others do not complete the process of learning. A number of factors contribute to this variance between members of EFA. I find that the most influential factors are electoral success, parties' organizational structures, and their access to institutions.

Introduction

Recent years have shown that Europe's stateless nationalist and regionalist political parties[1] are no longer relegated to the periphery. The Catalan independence movement, including two main political parties and two large civil society organisations, has mobilized millions of supporters each Catalan National Day since 2012. The movement reached its apogee on the 1st of October 2017, when a Catalan independence referendum resulted in a tense stand-off with the Spanish Government. The sustained success of the Scottish National Party (SNP) led the Scottish Government to hold a referendum on independence in 2014. The party's apparent 'failure' in that referendum has only spurred an unprecedented membership increase. The SNP has become the second largest political party in the United Kingdom by membership and the third largest party in the UK's House of Commons.

Beyond these most prominent cases, nationalist and regionalist parties have proliferated across Europe. In 2015, thirteen regionalist and nationalist parties participated in regional and national governments including in Flanders, Corsica, and six different Spanish regions (EFA Press Release, 2.2.16). The 2017 French elections put significant pressure on the French Government when a nationalist and regionalist coalition won 56.5% of votes in Corsica (Willsher, 2017). Journalists have, in an often embellished manner, warned of the 'rumble of secessionism,' the 'siren call of separatism,' and the possible independentist 'contagion' across Europe (Zaretsky, 2015; *The Economist,* 2018; Daftary, 2014; MacDonald and Taylor, 2014).

A rich tradition of scholarship on regionalism and nationalism has emerged alongside political developments, not least from the University of Edinburgh

[1]Throughout this thesis, I use the term 'nationalist and regionalist party' as a shorter form of stateless nationalist and regionalist party. Stateless nationalist and regionalist parties are based at a sub-state level and emphasize sub-state territorial interests (Hepburn, 2009: 495).

where I have written this PhD. Much of this scholarship has been comparative between European nationalists and regionalists. This thesis also takes a comparative approach. However, these political parties do not emerge from a vacuum in each domestic context. Rather, there are, and have long been, relationships between nationalist and regionalist parties in Europe. This thesis undertakes an exploration of that interconnectedness.

This is most tangibly traced by taking the European political party structure of the European Free Alliance (EFA) as a starting point. Stateless regionalist and nationalist political parties coalesce under EFA as its transnational political party. EFA unites parties in the European Parliament (EP), but also acts far beyond the EP. EFA has existed for more than 35 years, although its name and composition has changed. Under the European Free Alliance, most of Europe's regionalist and nationalist political parties attend joint events and assemblies, develop joint policy projects, and sit together in the European Parliament.

My interest in the relationships between Europe's nationalists and regionalists stems from my previous personal and professional experiences. Working in Scottish politics, I experienced transnational relationships between political parties on a grassroots level. In the run up to the Scottish independence referendum, the Yes campaign was joined by Welsh Plaid Cymru activists. On one particularly memorable afternoon, campaign letters were folded to the dulcet tones of half a dozen Welsh activists. The day before the 2014 referendum, I greeted enthusiastic Catalan visitors in the Yes Edinburgh campaign headquarters. They asked excitedly where the street parties would be—after all, they had become accustomed to this mass mobilization in Barcelona. Cultural and strategic differences did not hinder European nationalists' enthusiasm for the Scottish cause. It became clear to me that many of Europe's regionalists and nationalists saw their causes as tied

together. This interconnection was so meaningful that activists would travel significant distances of their own volition and at their own cost to be involved.

These experiences led me to consider what happens when these transnational independentist activists return home and to question the prevalence of transnational nationalist relationships. This thesis is the result of those questions. I seek to systematize and understand the relationships that Europe's regionalists and nationalists have to one another. I focus on one possible consequence: learning. I ask: do interactions between regionalist and nationalist parties in the European Free Alliance generate member party learning? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

I have chosen to understand this practice through interviews in order to reflect the voluntary, agential, and embodied nature of transnational party relationships. Interview respondents spanned from youth activists to retired party members to Government ministers. Fieldwork was conducted in Scotland, Friesland, Catalonia, Brittany, Silesia, Bavaria and Brussels.

Across these two years of data collection, I found that the European Free Alliance and its active members were not only constructing their own regions and nations. EFA and its members actively develop an alternative vision of the European Union. This is most succinctly depicted by EFA's slogan and hashtag: #AnotherEurope. Another Europe is, of course, a purposefully vague concept which takes into account the diversity of views within EFA. Parties' perspectives on the EU range from seeking statehood within the EU to seeking to minimize the role of states altogether. Nonetheless, the EFA vision of Another Europe boils down the promotion of supranational Europe that is less tied to its component states. Another Europe, they posit, would rather reflect a 'Europe of the Peoples.' Understanding transnational relationships in the European Free Alliance thus reflects both on regionalist and nationalist parties and on the nature of the European Union.

The concept of the transnational political party (TNP) in Europe emerged from the European Parliament but the TNP has since gone on to develop extra-Parliamentary bodies. To outline the purpose of transnational political parties, it is useful to return to the Maastricht Treaty's earliest conceptualizations of a political party in the EU. The original text noted that: "Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union."

In his chapter on the integration of transnational parties, Johansson concluded that, "Clearly, [European political parties] fulfil a coordinating function: they promote the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge and experience; and they play an important role in facilitating and institutionalizing networks" (2009: 163). This thesis considers the consequences of transnational exchange of information between domestic parties, facilitated in this case by the European Free Alliance.

Stateless nationalist and regionalist parties are a particularly useful case when considering transnational relationships in the European Union. In the 1980s and 1990s, structures such as the European Parliament and EFA, the Committee of the Regions, Structural Funds, and the Committee of the Regions and Local Authorities in the Council of Europe incentivized nationalists and regionalists to develop pro-European ideologies and to invest in relationships at the EU level (Keating, 2004: 376-378). Since this time, theoretical explorations of the conceptual relationship between the state, region, and supranational and empirical research on regionalist mobilization in the EU has spurred a 'minor scholarly industry' (Keating, 2008: 629). The term "Europe of the Regions" emerged to describe and drive the phenomenon of regionalist and nationalist mobilization at the EU level.

The consolidation of the European Free Alliance occurred during the height of the Europe of the Regions (Elias, 2008: 558). EFA member parties became more 'internationalized' and accepting of the EU during this time (Hepburn, 2009; Lynch and DeWinter, 2008). However, by 2004, it was clear that the envisioned Europe of the Regions would not deliver on what was promised. The Committee of the Regions was perceived as a powerless talking shop, EU enlargement to the East did not benefit the regions, and EFA had a disappointing performance in the 2004 EP elections (Lynch and DeWinter, 2008: 596-597).

The Europe of the Regions concept quickly became less useful to parties, because it was not genuinely implemented at the EU level (Elias, 2008). However, regional engagement at the EU level remains (at least) "an important side-strategy" for regionalist parties (Swenden and Bolleyer, 2014: 397). Regional actors have continued to seek decentralization within their states, to develop offices in Brussels, to lobby the EU institutions through collective organisations, and, through these means, to be relevant actors in European integration (Elias, 2008: 487).

Despite setbacks in the Europe of the Regions vision, the European Free Alliance continues to facilitate transnational communication between nationalist and regionalist parties. The EU also provides space for regional power and lobbying. As one EFA EP policy adviser said: "Having the EU, which has been created by states, is the best way to reconstruct our nations. It has not been done for us, but paradoxically it's good for us. The only way to recreate our natural exchanges in Corsica with Sardinia, Italy, Catalonia, is through the EU. It was not created in such a way, but it is done through the EU" (Interview 37). To exploit these opportunities, many nationalist and regionalist parties invest time and resources into the EFA's structures of cooperation.

More than state-wide parties, nationalist and regionalist parties rely on their transnational political party to access EU institutions. Most EFA members do not have state-level governing power. Only one EFA member is in state-wide government: the Flemish Nieuwe Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA). State governments are the most influential actors in the EU, through their role in the European Council and power to nominate members to the Commission. Nationalist and regionalist parties' lack of governing power means that EFA members are unable to access these roles. They are thus more likely to use EFA to gain influence in Brussels. In addition to the rise of regionalist and nationalist parties over recent years, the European Free Alliance's small size and parties' commitment to transnationalism make it an ideal case to study in this thesis.

EFA's Director Gunther Dauwen stated:

> "We only have an impact because we are a family, a synergy, a group, a consistent view. Each time we push parties who do matter in size and in numbers and try to push them to take certain things on board. It's difficult to put your finger on what exactly...it's always about some points in commas, some few words here and there that are erased and added."

This thesis pulls together three strands addressed in this introduction and in Dauwen's quote. First, nationalist and regionalist political parties, involved in some of Europe's most dramatic political moments of the last five years, have transnational relationships. In many cases, respondents refer to their EFA partners as 'family' or 'sister parties.' However, these parties have thus far been studied comparatively rather than considering interdependently. In this thesis, I explore the concept of learning as one of the possible consequences of parties' interactions in EFA. This helps to highlight that party decision making is not entirely distinct.

Second, transnational parties are an understudied component of the EU. Transnational political parties, first called 'political parties at a European level,' contribute to the shape of EU politics. This is particularly relevant in the run up to the 2019 European elections and in the context of concerns about the EU's

‘democratic deficit.’ EFA’s frequent call for ‘Another Europe’ and promotion of a Europe of the Peoples model shows that transnational political parties can contribute to political conceptualizations of what the European Union is and should be.

Third, and predominantly, this thesis emphasizes the movement of information across borders, through political parties and activists. In Dauwen’s words, I seek to ‘put my finger on’ what is pushed, acquired, and taken on board when nationalist and regionalist parties interact with one another.

To do so, I take four case studies: the Frisian National Party (FNP), the Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), and the Scottish National Party (SNP). The next two chapters of this thesis justify the choice of a learning lens to approach the European Free Alliance and put forth a framework to structure the concept of political party learning. I develop a three-stage process of party learning and identify five possible contextual factors that affect parties’ experiences of learning. Each political party case study is examined through this party learning lens. These cases, when compared to one another, allow me to develop preliminary conclusions about the nature of party learning in the EFA network, as well as reflect on the concept of party learning.

I find that party learning is particularly concentrated on electoral strategies and vote-seeking, often with specific interest in the model of the Scottish National Party. Less successful political parties are more likely to learn, although they may struggle to do so. More successful political parties are less likely to learn from the European Free Alliance, and instead seek information on new policies and political strategies through institutional means and para-diplomacy. Findings also reveal patterns of relationships in the European Free Alliance. They show that EFA’s relationships are strongly affected by differential electoral success and governing responsibility. EFA is also comprised of

numerous sub-groups which organise around cultural, geographical, and ideological similarities.

These findings allow me to reflect on the proposed party learning framework and to open up space for further refinement of the framework. Further theoretical work could seek to clarify the relationship between government and party learning or to more deeply consider the role of 'time' and the transnational level in learning.

Thesis Structure

Chapter One considers the role of the political party domestically and then moves on to the role of transnational political parties in the European Union. I argue that existing studies of transnational political parties over-emphasize the European Parliament and narratives of further integration. Then, I propose considering the transnational political party as a network of political parties. Taking forward the networked concept, I propose that learning can best help us understand what passes between domestic political parties in a transnational political party. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the learning literature which recognizes its interdisciplinary roots. Bringing the different dimensions of learning together, I propose a party learning framework and five relevant contextual factors.

Chapter Two sets out the comparative research design of this thesis. I justify the use of a small sample qualitative comparison and my case selection. The remainder of the chapter elaborates on the process of data collection and data analysis. I particularly emphasize the benefits and difficulties of using qualitative interview and observational data. This chapter also reflects on my positionality in doing this research.

Chapter Three considers the role of the European Free Alliance as a structure that brings together regionalist and nationalist parties and as a case of a transnational political party. I elaborate on each of the different parts of EFA in

order to provide contextual information and to clarify how a transnational political party works in practice. The second part of this chapter considers the role of domestic member parties in the European Free Alliance. It particularly isolates one part of the research question: interactions between political parties and disaggregates different types of interactions which occur within EFA. Finally, this chapter considers the role of the individual actor within the member party and EFA.

Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven each study a different EFA member party, in order: the Frisian National Party, the Union Démocratique Bretonne, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and the Scottish National Party. These chapters follow parallel structures. First, I introduce each party. Second, I consider how each performs on the five contextual factors identified in Chapter Two. Third, I map each party's relationships in the European Free Alliance and beyond, if applicable. Finally, I conclude whether and what the party has learned from the European Free Alliance or, in some cases, why the party hasn't learned. Chapter Six compares two Catalan political parties: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and Partit Demòcrata Català, to investigate the role of EFA membership in shaping transnational relationships.

Chapter Eight will synthesize the thesis's findings by conducting cross-case analysis and reflecting on the theoretical framework employed in this thesis. I review the main cases of learning identified in Chapters Four through Seven. I consider key findings about each stage of the learning process. I further reflect on the learning framework theoretically by delineating the boundaries of the concept.

Chapter Nine reflects on the thesis and concludes. I consider the theoretical and methodological difficulties faced by this study and also propose routes to further explore the concept of political party learning. Finally, I consider what the findings of this thesis mean for three strands of political phenomena: the

increasingly globalized movement of information, transnationalism and the EU, and the role of regionalist and nationalist political parties.

Chapter One: Building a Political Party Learning Framework

Even before the development of the European Parliament or the European Free Alliance, there were transnational connections between Europe's stateless nationalists and regionalists. In 1974, the Breton, Welsh, Galician, Irish, Catalan, Basque and Sardinian movements signed a charter of solidarity (Schrijver, 2006: 212). In 1979, the European Free Alliance was further formalized through the Declaration of Bastia (Kernalegenn, 2013: 29). However, EFA's institutionalization through the European Parliament and EU regulations has regularized interactions between Europe's nationalists and regionalists.

Domestic political party interactions within the framework of the transnational political party (in this case EFA) are the starting point of my thesis. This chapter reviews existing theoretical approaches to domestic political parties and transnational political parties. I propose that a learning approach is an appropriate lens through which to study the relationship between domestic political parties in a transnational political party (TNP).

The 'political party at the European level' has received an increasingly important role in the European Union. In 2004, a new transnational political party regulation (Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003) came into force to give a clear legal personality to TNPs as well as to more clearly define criteria for funding. The 2004 regulation led to a clear separation of the EP party group and the extra-Parliamentary TNP staff. The EU's transnational parties thus began to develop a clearer legal personality and organisational structure outwith the European Parliament legislative environment (Lightfoot, 2006: 308-309). In 2014, the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations was established for registering, controlling and imposing sanctions on European Political Parties and European Political Foundations.

The process of developing the TNP has embedded it within EU politics. As it gains permanence, the transnational political party requires more sophisticated analysis. The TNP has too long been studied through the lens of the European Parliament and European integration. There is not sufficient understanding of its effect on domestic party politics.

This thesis emphasizes the relationship between the transnational party and domestic party choices by asking whether and how interactions between domestic member parties in the TNP generate domestic party learning. In this chapter, I review literature on the three key elements of this question: the role of the domestic political party, the role of the transnational political party (TNP), and the concept of learning. The first section of this chapter gives a broad overview of theories about political party change and situates this thesis in discussions of intra-party debates on policy. The second section reviews existing conceptualizations and terminology around transnational political parties and argues that the TNP can be considered a network. In the third section, I justify my choice of a learning approach, explore the interdisciplinary nature of the learning literature, and the various dimensions of learning. Finally, I conclude by proposing a political party learning framework.

1.1 Conceptualizing the Domestic Political Party

Political parties are theorized as an essential part of modern democracies. Parties both separate (*partire)* the electorate from one another and allow voters/interest groups to *take part* in politics (Sartori, 2005: 4). In other words, parties structure a political ‘clash of ideas’ and represent the electorate’s ideas (Allern and Bale, 2012: 8). In this section, I review existing understandings of political party change to show the diverse range of influences on party choice. The rest of this chapter and thesis will propose that learning from transnational interactions would be one possible influence on party choice. Learning would specifically affect elite intra-party debate.

Most theories of political party positioning stem from the Downs model. This model characterizes parties as rational, vote-maximizing organisations playing a zero-sum electoral game with other parties (Downs: 1957: 137). Vote maximization leads parties, in a two party system, to converge on the median voter's position. Understanding parties as vote maximizers leads to the organization of parties along ideological scales (most often left-right). The vote maximizing model produces a further rational choice logic to explain how parties are electorally motivated to differentiate themselves along this scale (Adams, 2001: 123). Many adjustments and critiques of the Downs model have been developed (Meyer, 2013: 18-20). For example, scholars have noted that parties may be driven by other goals such as office or policies or seek to incorporate the role of party uncertainty and ideology (Müller et al., 1999; Budge, 1994). These competitive explanations are important and dominant narratives in explaining party choice. However, Meyer notes that the picture of party policy shifts is more complicated, because both voters and party organisations must accept policy changes (2013: 22-27).

Furthermore, one of the early theorists of political learning noted: "Politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty-men collectively wondering what to do" (Heclo, 1974: 305). This idea of a positive, policy-seeking approach means that scholars must move beyond competitive narratives to look at the intra-party level of decision making.

This thesis is based at the intra-party level. I consider how transnational interactions alter parties' internal decision making and negotiation processes. While voters and party competition may spur policy change, political parties contemporaneously develop internal debates. Intra-party debates reflect parties' role as interest aggregators, integrators and mobilizers. In their theory of party change, Budge et al. emphasize internal party factionalism and conclude that 'party policy is shaped more by internal considerations than electoral calculations' (2010: 785). Political parties adapt their behaviour based

on deliberation and debate with other political parties *and* with one another. Parties negotiate competing ideas about what the party is and should do; this ideational process ties closely into the process of learning.

Who engages in intra-party debates? Political parties are comprised of many different parts: the 'party in public office,' the 'party on the ground,' and the 'party in central office' (Katz and Mair, 1994: 408-409). Of these parts, the party in public office (i.e. elected officials) has strengthened in recent years. The central office staff of the party also have a key role to play due to its ability to connect the party to civil society actors. The increased role of Parliamentarians (those in office) and professional staff is enhanced by processes of professionalization. Professionalization alters the staff structures of parties, often resulting in increased stature for 'expertise' in parties (Kolodny and Webb, 2006). Professionalization is a particularly relevant concept for the regionalist and nationalist parties studied in this thesis; their attempts to professionalize will emerge in the empirical chapters. As such, despite the development of intra-party democracy and narratives of political party democratization, "the large majority of parties seem relatively unconcerned about their memberships and are instead much more focused on reaching out to the wider public through professional campaigning and marketing techniques" (Van Biezen et al., 2011: 39).

Intra-party debate is thus dominated by party elites and the estimated one in seven party members that are active. Furthermore, these active party members emulate the characteristics of political elite. They are older, better off, better educated, and associated in other organisations such as churches and unions (Van Biezen et al., 2011). While some have proposed that the rise of the internet will democratize political parties, the picture is mixed. Mainstream political parties in the UK and US have used the internet for 'topdown information provision' while some smaller parties like the Green Party in the UK have 'more genuinely interactive uses of technology' (Römmele, 2003: 15).

Relationships between political parties across borders is more likely to tie into elite intra-party debates. Transnational political parties, due to the resources, time and expertise required, are often elite dominated. Furthermore, “unlike national political parties, the electorate, the membership, the rank-and-file and other actors cannot compete with the leadership, as these party components do not exist at the transnational level” (Van Hecke, 2010: 398). As such, this thesis specifically looks at how transnational party interactions affect intra-party elite decision making. It considers whether elites learn from their transnational interactions.

The learning approach has previously been seen as relevant to parties’ policy making. For example, prominent scholars have argued that political parties are possible agents of learning (Stone, 1999: 55; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 10). Through a study of British economic policy making, Hall showed that political parties play a part in the domestic process of social learning (1993). The interview-based nature of my research allows me to further clarify the effect of learning on intra-party negotiations. In the empirical chapters, I note, where relevant, when party learning is constrained or complementary to other influences on party decision making (such as party competition).

Transnational political party interactions are in their nature an elite activity. I consider how transnational interactions influence domestic party decision making. As such, this thesis emphasizes the role of intra-party dynamics on party choice and change. I specifically explore how active, elite individuals in party organisations introduce, defend, and debate ideas. The rest of this chapter conceptualizes the role and nature of the transnational political party and how these interactions might affect intra-party negotiations of interests and information.

1.2 Conceptualizing the Transnational Political Party

Domestic political parties are considered essential elements of a state's democracy. Internal party politics is thus often the subject of news and speculation. The same cannot be said for the place of transnational political parties in the European Union. The TNP has often taken a back seat, even to already second-order European news. Rather than studying transnational party activities, scholars often assume that in the EU "political party influence goes via the national government" (Gaffney, 1996: 15). Theoretically, the study of parties at the EU level is "'caught' within the state-centric paradigm" (Van Hecke, 2010: 402).

Transnational political parties are also caught in a normative discussion around the EU's democratization and integration. Books on political parties in the EU ask, for example: "Might there be a connection between future EU integration and the organizational development of transnational parties?" (Hix and Lord, 1997: 167). This argument often takes ideological terms. For example, 'idealists' believe that European political parties can contribute to a truly transnational democracy while 'realists' hold that the national party will always dominate (Day, 2014). Hix and Lord make recommendations to allow transnational parties to fulfil the five criteria of 'party democracy' (1997: 214-220). Transnational parties are thus often tested against the standards of domestic democracy and found insufficient.

In this thesis, European political parties are neither tested against the power of the state nor seen as a measure or arbiter of EU democratization. The transnational political party and its contemporary form is the focal point of my research. As such, I now first review existing literature on the transnational political party and then propose that TNPs should be consider as networked entities.

(1) Terminology

Transnational political parties are an ill-defined object. This lack of definition is so deep that many studies of TNPs begin with scepticism about the 'reality' of the transnational party. For example, Johansson says, "to some extent Europarties are actors in their own right…yet they have seldom been treated as independent actors carrying 'agency'" (2015: 2). Others conclude that the term 'political party' is a misnomer in the case of the Europarty (Sigalas and Pollak, 2012: 23). A back and forth on the 'question of existence' has dominated the literature on TNPs (Van Hecke, 2010: 408). This contested conceptualization has meant that 'Europarties remain under-researched (and seemingly underestimated)' (Johansson, 2016: 80).

This debate is worsened by a lack of clear terminology. In EU regulations, 'the political party at EU level' has a defined status which allows it to receive funding.[2] The political party at the EU level is 'an organisation following a political programme, which is composed of national parties and individuals as members and which is represented in several Member States' (European Parliament). This term is useful because it recognizes the status of European political parties as aggregating member parties, developing programmes for EP elections, and behaving on a European scale. Acting 'at EU level,' shows that the TNP works both above (supra-nationally) and across (transnationally) the member state. However, 'political party at the EU level' quickly becomes too cumbersome and too vague (Bressanelli, 2014: 2; Van Hecke, 2010: 397; Hix and Lord, 1997: 13-14).

The most substantial area of disagreement on terminology stems from the 'existence' debate. If transnational political parties are not truly parties, should they be termed something different? Early work especially argued that TNPs "cannot be regarded as 'parties' in the traditional sense, rather as loose coalitions of national parties" (Marsh and Norris, 1997: 155). The most common

[2] Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 of the European Parliament.

alternative to the term ‘party’ is federation; in some cases, the two terms are used interchangeably (Holmes and Lightfoot, 2011: 32). The term federation draws on Niedermeyer’s 1983 classification of transnational parties into 3 stages: contact, cooperation and integration. Federations sit at the cooperation stage. The move to become a ‘party’ at the integration stage would then be determined by the amount of sovereignty that is transferred from national member party to TNP (Dietz, 2000: 202). Federation connotes that TNPs bring together multiple national political parties yet do not have full coercive powers (Van Hecke, 2010: 397-398). ‘Federation’ is mostly used in studies of the *development* of TNPs over time. My research puts aside questions of development over time and of integration. I avoid the use of the term ‘federation,’ given that it is so closely tied to judgments of a TNP’s developmental stage.

Another specification occurs in applying the term of ‘European,’ which highlights the distinctly EU-linked nature of the transnational political party development. No other international body in the world has developed a similar level of transnational political activism (Van Hecke, 2010: 397). However, it is not *theoretically* necessary to restrict our conceptualization of transnational parties to Europe. Empirically, the boundaries of transnational political parties are often blurrier than they seem. For example, the European Free Alliance has close relationships to activists and politicians in Quebec and Kurdistan; it receives interest from parties as far abroad as California and sub-Saharan Africa. Transnational party co-operation is not limited to the borders of Europe.

Rather than using the term ‘European’ I distinguish transnational parties from their national counter parts through the term transnational. The concept of transnational relations in the EU refers to “regular interactions across national boundaries where at least one actor is a non-state agent” (Risse-Kappen et al., 1995: 3). The term is vague, but it makes an important point that political activism has moved beyond state-to-state international relations. Considering

the transnational aspects of the EU also emphasizes the "transnational cooperation, communication, socialization and policy transfer of functionally transnational actors below the EU level" (Kaiser and Starie, 2005: 10). The European Union's transnational political parties are a prime example of these cross-border non-state centric relations. As such, I will call the 'political party at the European level' a transnational political party (TNP) (also adopted by Hanley, 2008).

Figure 1.1: Organisational Structures in Transnational Parties (TNP)

- EP party group: MEPs and EP group staff
- Secretariat: organizing staff
- Bureau: programme steering group
- Associations: related youth, student, women's groups
- Political foundations: political think tanks linked to each TNP
- Member parties: national parties with membership of the TNP

The study of the transnational political party has also suffered from confusion over the name of each component part. Early on, there were three dimensions of transnational activity: the Euro-Parliamentary, the party-organisational, and the national party (Pridham and Pridham, 1981: 278). The party-organisational arena includes TNP central staff and secretariat. Confusingly, this TNP party-organisational component has also been called the 'party federation' (Bardi, 2004: 20; Lightfoot, 2006: 310).

The secretariat, as it will be called in this thesis, is the central TNP hub of coordination. Secretariats communicate with all member parties, not just those with elected MEPs. Each secretariat also reports to a bureau, comprised of political elite, who can be seen as a programmatic steering group that set TNP priorities. The 2004 European regulation incentivized the creation of the extra-Parliamentary secretariat.

Meanwhile, the EP party group is comprised of elected Members of the European Parliament, their personal Parliamentary assistants, and the EP party group staff. Since 2008, there have been sectoral associations linked to the TNP, such as youth groups, women's groups, and political foundations tied to each TNP (Day, 2014: 7). The terms I use for each part are summarized in Figure 1.1. This will be further clarified in Chapter Four, when each term is unpacked in relation to the case of the European Free Alliance.

(2) Existing Knowledge about TNPs

Having settled on the term TNP, it is now important to consider what we know about TNP behaviour and its effect on member parties. There are two clear strands of enquiry: one into the development of the TNP over time and one into the behaviour of the EP party group. The latter narrative focuses studies of the TNP on the European Parliament and considers whether the EP party group conditions the behaviour of MEPs. The former borrows from European 'integration' narratives and considers whether TNP's member parties have become more cohesive and integrated over time. Neither of these approaches adequately considers the multi-level nature of the TNP, because they over-emphasize the supranational and Brussels-based effects of the TNP.

The Parliamentary strand of inquiry into TNPs is the most empirically developed. Drawing on EP roll call vote data, scholars have interrogated EP party group cohesion and considered whether systematically, EP party groups fall along competitive ideological lines (Hix et al., 2005; Lindberg et al., 2008; Hix, 2008; Meserve et al., 2017). They find that party group cohesion is increasing, despite more national and ideological diversity within EP party groups. Studies conclude that "European party groups are able to have a disciplining effect on their national member parties" (Hix et. al, 2005: 231). The TNP may thus generate adaptation (such as learning) by member party elites.

However, the data used to develop this is too focused on the behaviour of MEPs, who may be marginal to the behaviour of domestic political parties.

The reliance on roll-call vote data means that these findings can only reflect on the nature of European Parliament groups. Since the changes in TNP regulations, the TNP has expanded to have significantly more functions and organisational bodies, as can be seen in Figure 1.1. The over-emphasis on the EP group is in part because this work was done before the expansion of TNP structures. Hix and Lord's book *Political Parties in the European Union* (1997) dedicates three chapters to the functions of the European party group and only one chapter to TNP functions beyond Parliament. The emphasis on Parliamentary functions also reflects that the development of the concept of transnational political party structures stems from the first elections to the European Parliament (Hix, 1998: 309-310).

Prior to the 2004 change in regulations, TNPs relied on their party group for funding and a structural institutional role (Lightfoot, 2006: 305). However, since these regulations, the separate TNP secretariat has begun to play a more important role in TNP behaviour. The secretariat coordinates relationships between member parties and develops 'vision' documents, which guide EP party group decisions in the short and medium-term policy areas (Gagateck and Van Hecke, 2011: 3). Member parties' relationships to the transnational political party do not only flow through the MEP or European Parliament. As such, a more comprehensive approach to studying TNP effects on member parties is required. This thesis explicitly seeks to move academic understandings of the TNP beyond the European Parliament.

The other dominant narrative in studies of TNPs is the attempt to classify different types of transnational political party, often along different stages of development. The most comprehensive attempt is Day's 2005 analysis of the Party of European Socialists (PES). Using the PES case, Day identifies three

types of transnational political parties: (1) those that facilitate national party leader relationships to one another; (2) those that act as a 'meta-network,' fulfilling tasks not relevant to the domestic party; and (3) those that act as representative mass-parties connected directly to the 'demos' (Day, 2005: 63). Each stage is more integrated than the one before. Day's 3 stages of the TNP relate to three 'generations' of legal regulation of parties: those predating 2004 reforms, 2004 to 2009, and post-2009 (2014: 6-7). In 2004, the Party Regulation increased funding opportunities offered by the European Commission, for Secretariats able to meet the criteria. The 2009 European Parliament election offered the first opportunity for TNPs to campaign, which was prohibited before 2007, but these campaigns were 'underwhelming' leading to increased frustration and scepticism about TNP potential to integrate further (Day, 2014: 15). Politically and theoretically, TNPs "remain in a state of becoming" (Day and Shaw, 2006: 162). While this is an important part of the literature, it is not the focus of this thesis which studies one TNP over a short, contemporary period of time rather than studying its development over the longer term.

While the literature on TNPs is often critical and sceptical of TNP' importance, scholars have begun to consider their *influence* on policy outcomes, for example on EU treaty negotiations (Johansson, 2016; Van Hecke, 2012). A 2004 book by Delwit, Kulachi and Van de Walle aims to analyse TNPs' policy influence on the European Union, even though they recognise that TNPs "do not encompass a reality, or a conceptual abstraction, similar to parties that evolve at national level" (10). This thesis proposes that, regardless of one's opinion on the 'reality' of the TNP, it is possible and important to study the influence of transnational political parties. In this thesis, I particularly focus on the effect of the TNP on internal outcomes, specifically the choices of its member parties. To understand how TNPs affect their member parties, I argue that it is most apt to characterize the transnational political party as a network.

(3) Transnational Political Parties as a Network

The emphasis on transnational political parties' development over time and on their Parliamentary behaviour stems from scholars' reliance on domestic party-political approaches. A party scholar would struggle to approach a TNP from any other perspective; this "is to conceive of something of which we have no real-world experience" (Mair and Thomassen, 2010: 24). I seek to study and conceptualize the transnational political party using an approach suited to the multi-level politics of the European Union: networks. I argue that the transnational political party can be characterized as a network of member political parties. I draw on policy, transnational activist and inter-organisational network approaches to substantiate this conceptualization.

The 'network' concept emerges in numerous academic disciplines including comparative politics, public administration, organization theory, and economic sociology. It even extends to neurology, ecosystems and technology (Ansell, 2000: 303). In social sciences, a network is most generally be defined as a set of non-hierarchical, interdependent relationships between actors who exchange resources to reach a common goal (Börzel, 1998: 254). Network thinking is underpinned by the proposition that no one body centrally controls decisions, intelligence, information, or resources (Kenis and Schneider, 1991: 26). The European Union's dispersed power and decision-making process make it "a 'hot house' for policy networks precisely because its processes are so fluid, and policy-outcomes depend - more than in most other systems of governance - on informal bargaining" (Peterson, 1995: 390).

As Peterson notes, in studies of the European Union, policy networks are the predominant form. Policy networks are comprised of formal and informal linkages between the government and non-state actors, based around a common belief or policy goal and based in interdependence (Rhodes, 2006: 426). Another definition emphasizes the "mediation of interests of governments

and interest groups" which occurs when "clusters of actors representing multiple organisations interact with one another and share information and resources" (Peterson, 1995: 391) Policy networks emphasize interdependence, the presence of state and non-state actors, and the effect of networks in a particular policy sector.

These last two criteria mean that the policy networks approach is not directly applicable to TNPs, which work across policies and act in a non-state capacity. However, network thinking has also been applied more widely in the EU. For example, the behaviour of transnational political parties can be related to the concept of transnational political activism (in political parties, NGOs, think tanks or social movements). In order to develop in a cross-border manner, these activist organisations mobilized in networked ways. Transnational activist networks are stimulated by the "vertical experience" of being part of an international organisation like the EU. International organizations have "helped to produce the 'horizontal' formation of transnational coalitions through the networks of activists that form around them" (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 9).

Transnational political parties and their member parties share characteristics of a policy network: (1) interdependent relationships at the EU level, (2) co-operation underpinned by a common goal, and (3) action aimed at a mutually agreed outcome. They also resemble transnational activist networks, because their cooperation is incentivized by their participation in the 'vertical' EU which then allows them to strengthen and expand their horizontal connections to one another. The networks approach is often flexibly applied in order to emphasize a relational process. To emphasize the relational, cooperative nature of the TNP and its member parties, I consider the TNP as *networked*.

Stemming from work on economics, sociology and business, the literature on inter-organisational networks has two additional insights to add to the conceptualization of the TNP as networked. Inter-organisational networks are

multi-level and emphasize performance rather than policy goals. An inter-organisational network is: “a particular form of organizing, or governing, exchange relationships among organisations” (Ebers, 1999: 3). Ebers defines the inter-organisational network as “recurring exchange relationships among a limited number of organisations that retain residual control of their individual resources yet periodically jointly decide over their use” (1999: 3). This definition is suitable to the ways that domestic political parties join a transnational political party. Member parties predominantly maintain their own resources and, as Day’s (2005) classification shows, the TNP does not have coercive power. However, parties do choose to cooperate to access joint resource (through the EU). Furthermore, they choose to contribute some of their own resources to the TNP in order to be full members.

Inter-organisational networks are a particularly useful concept because it recognizes that networks often have three distinct levels: (1) the network level; (2) the organisational level; and (3) the individual level (Knight, 2002: 436). The transnational political party has three distinct levels of actor: the TNP (Brussels based bodies), the domestic member party, and the individual party member/elite. Policy networks focus on behaviour at ‘a meso-level’ between interest groups and the government, without differentiating the level at which actors are interacting (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992: 202). As such, the inter-organisational network model provides an additional insight to show how the TNP is networked, in a multi-level context. Transnational political parties have been characterized as “a network of relations (formal and informal), weaving links between the different levels of vertical (European, national, regional) and horizontal powers” (Delwit et al., 2004: 10).

Furthermore, in the inter-organisational network model, the outcome of interest is not policy but improved ‘performance’ (Leseure et al., 2001; Dodds et al., 2003). A systematic review of inter-organisational studies highlighted that outcome variables of interest were predominantly power/control, prevalence

and success (Oliver and Ebers, 1998: 565). In the chapters that follow, it becomes clear that the European Free Alliance, its member parties, and elite actors have strong 'performance' goals: getting votes, receiving funding, growing membership, gaining recognition, and legitimacy. These performance goals may include achieving ideological goals, but they are not exclusively based in these policy aims.

I characterise the transnational political party as a networked body that reflects characteristics of policy, transnational activist, and inter-organisational networks. It comprises of member organisations (political parties) in interdependent relationships that cooperate based on both a common belief system and seek a common goal of increased performance (predominantly electoral success). The TNP network bridges vertical levels of decision making (the EU, the state, the region) and types of actors (the transnational party, the member party, individual members).

The term 'network' has previously been used when referring to TNPs. For example, TNPs have been called 'meta-networks' (Day, 2005); 'Europarty networks' (Speht, 2002: 186), and 'party networks' (Dunphy and March, 2013). They have been shown to engage in networked behaviour around venues such as the Convention on the Future of Europe (Van Hecke, 2012). The term has also been proposed by the TNPs themselves. Perhaps most prominently, the Party of European Socialists (PES) launched a "Network Europe" project in 1998 to develop stronger communication across the local and European elements of socialist parties in the EU. The Director of the European Free Alliance noted that the 'intangible' element of EFA is the 'possibility of synergy, contact, networking.' Considering the TNP as a network helps to emphasize its relational nature, with both formal and informal elements.

There have been numerous critiques of the network concept which argue that networks lack explanatory value. Networks, critics argue, better describe the

static shape of policy making processes than how actors reached specific outcomes (Dowding, 1995; Rhodes, 2006: 436). In this thesis, the network concept is not used to provide an explanation for the decision making in the TNP or member parties. Given the ill-defined nature of transnational political parties, the network approach is a useful way to describe the relationships between political parties in a transnational political party. It is thus “an analytical model, a framework of interpretation, in which different actors are located and linked in their interaction in a policy sector and in which the results of this interaction are analysed” (Börzel, 1998: 259).

As such, it is necessary to move beyond conceptualizing the nature of the TNP as a networked entity. The main question of this thesis is concerned with what is *exchanged* within the TNP. These internal exchanges require further analysis. Whether in policy or organisational network literatures, ‘it is incumbent on the researcher to provide an explanation of the underlying process or, in other words, to supply the theory’ (Zaheer et al., 2010: 63). To supply the theory to network approaches, scholars can consider the internal consequences of the network (its effect on members, structure, changes over time) and/or the external consequences (its effect on policy). In this thesis, I have chosen to focus specifically on the internal effect of relationships within the TNP network on member parties.

Networked relationships facilitate negotiation and exchange between members. The objects of exchange are resources, information, and ideas. The communication of information within networks is not ‘trivial’; information exchange is essential to the behaviour of actors, negotiation of outcomes, and creation of alliances (Leifeld and Schneider, 2012: 731-732). Information is particularly relevant to studying transnational political parties. Members of a transnational political party participate in a voluntary manner and resource exchange is minimal. One study of transnational advocacy networks argued that due to their horizontal and voluntary nature, “modern networks are not

conveyor belts of liberal ideals, but vehicles for communicative and political exchange, with the potential for mutual transformation of participants" (Keck and Sikkink, 1999: 100).

One such transformation of network members, spurred by information exchange, is learning. Learning has often been connected to transnational networks. Networks are seen as spaces that engender 'strategic learning' by actors by encouraging the sharing of best practice (Marsh and Smith, 2000: 9; Maggetti, 2014: 498). Scholars have applied learning to recognise that "members of a network share consensual knowledge and collective ideas and values…pursuing their goals, advocacy and discourse coalitions do not resort to strategic bargaining but rather rely on processes of communicative action" (Börzel, 1998: 264). Transnational networks are particularly conducive to learning because they require members to "build alliances, share discourses and construct consensual knowledge" (Stone, 2007: 560). A network first builds the *relationships* which conduct information across borders and then, by developing a shared goal, encourages members of the network to share information. The next section of this chapter further conceptualizes how learning might occur specifically within the transnational political party framework.

1.3 Conceptualizing Learning in the TNP Network

As noted in the previous section, I am particularly interested in the way that information flows between members of a transnational political party. While there are some resource transfers (from the EU to the TNP, the member party to the TNP), the major work of the transnational party is informational. At the Brussels level, the TNP's central bodies share information about the goals and work of the TNP members or its EP Group to external actors. At a national level, TNP member parties exchange information with one another, often based

around common interests. Information is exchanged from member party to member party, often facilitated by the TNP's central staff.

To understand how information exchange may affect member parties, I propose a learning approach. In this section, I first differentiate learning from similar approaches, argue that it is the most appropriate approach, and then define how learning will be used in this thesis. I emphasize the way that TNPs bring together individual and collective learning and argue that in this case a process-focused understanding of learning is more apt than a behavioural, outcome-focused understanding.

(1) Differentiating Policy Diffusion, Transfer and Learning

Three main terms have been developed to trace the movement of information across space and time: policy diffusion, transfer and learning. Policy diffusion emerges from the International Relations discipline and studies the movement of policy across large sample studies, often quantitatively. Diffusion studies tend to focus on structural processes and conditions for the movement of policy, using larger quantitative data sets (Marsh and Sharman, 2009: 270). For example, the recent Party Policy Diffusion Study used manifesto data to show that parties respond to incumbent parties in neighbouring countries. This study can only "imply that parties are motivated to learn" rather than identifying specific mechanisms (Böhmelt, et al, 2016: 11). More qualitative research could investigate 'linkages between party organizations' rather than links between manifesto commitments (Böhmelt, et al, 2016: 12). Making linkages between organisations and individuals requires thinking at a lower level of analysis than diffusion.

Policy transfer describes how "knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 344). While diffusion is

focused on broader structures, transfer is focused on the object/idea/knowledge that has moved. Given its broad remit, transfer encompasses multiple processes including: learning, competition, coercion, mimicry, and socialization (Marsh and Sharman, 2009, 271). This breadth 'makes it difficult to disentangle from many other processes of policy making' (James and Lodge, 2003: 183; Evans, 2009: 238). Given my thesis's empirical breadth, I seek to use a more specific analytical approach: policy learning.

Learning is the most useful term to study political parties. Learning occurs when an individual updates their beliefs or behaviours based on 'lived or witnessed experiences, analysis or social interaction' (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 599). In this thesis, I also incorporate organisational learning. An organisation learns when "an organization's members actively use data to guide behaviour in such a way as to promote the ongoing adaptation of the organization" (Edmondson and Moingeon, 1998: 12). As opposed to policy diffusion and transfer, learning is an agential, 'action-oriented' perspective with a focus on actors and their intentions (Stone, 2001). An actor-centred approach is appropriate to the focus of this thesis: political parties, their elites, elites' interactions, and the outcomes of interaction. In the following two sections I unpack the theoretical roots of learning and two key dimensions to understanding the learning process.

(2) Theoretical Roots of Learning

Having chosen learning as the analytical tool to understand interactions between members of the transnational political party, I unpack the term 'learning' further. I will draw together three theoretical perspectives on learning: educational psychology, organizational/management learning, and policy learning. These threads have all contributed to political science understandings of learning. Zito and Schout note that "scholars working at the intersection of organization studies, psychology, political science and public administration

and sociology initiated the pioneering work in political studies' learning theory" (2009: 1106).

Educational psychology emphasizes that learning is a contributor to the many stages of human development (childhood, education, job training, counselling). For psychologists, learning is 'a change in an individual's behaviour or ability to do something,' stemming from their experiences (Shuell, 1986: 412). This initial definition at the individual level allows us to understand how individual agents within political parties learn through transnational interactions. However, in order to understand collective *party* learning, I emphasize organizational learning literatures.

Theories of organizational learning are rooted in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, management, and cultural anthropology (Easterby-Smith, 1997: 1086-1087). An organization learns if "an organization's members actively use data to guide behaviour in such a way as to promote the ongoing adaptation of the organization" (Edmondson and Moingeon, 1998: 12). However, learning in organizations may go beyond individual initiative. Organisational adaptation may lead to new 'routines' that encode learning more deeply (Levitt and March, 1998: 320). Levitt and March (1998) emphasize 'ecologies of learning,' which recognise the interaction between individual and collective processes in organizational learning.

Political science contributions to studies of organizations are 'underestimated' but, for those interested in policy making, the process of learning has always been present (LaPalombara, 2003: 141). Political science studies both the learning of individuals and collective learning. The former is often expressed in terms of the process of political socialization. Political socialization, for example, developed from the research into the education of children; its application to politics and children's socialization into politics rose in the 1960s

(Cook, 1985; Sapiro, 2004: 3). This older, socialization literature thus focused primarily on individuals.

Collective learning studies in political science are concentrated in the administrative and policy development literature. From a policy perspective, the learning approach emerged as a 'useful corrective' to more conflict driven understandings of policy making (Bennett and Howlett, 1992: 288). As Heclo famously said: "Politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty—men collectively wondering what to do" (1974: 305). One way that this collective wonderment can occur is through policy learning. Thirty years later, in policy and international relations disciplines, learning had "recently become a growth industry" (Meseguer, 2006: 38). She defines learning in the psychological sense, as "a change of beliefs in the light of the experiences of others" (Meseguer, 2005: 72). Policy learning can be seen as a rational, often governmental process in which actors reflect on their policy options by considering detailed 'cause and effect' descriptions of others' previous experiences (Rose, 1993: 27). However, policy learning may also be less instrumental and tied into a more social process (Checkel, 2001).

To bring together these three various strands of learning, I will review two important dimensions of learning that emerge from each discipline: individual v. collective learning and process v. outcome. Dunlop and Radaelli (2016) conclude that the binary questions associated with the learning literature (Is this learning or not? Is an actor able or unable to learn?) are limiting and make the concept of learning difficult to test (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2016: 108). To avoid this kind of binary thinking, my framework takes into account the complexity of political party learning. I integrate the process/outcome of learning and individual/collective learning, while keeping an openness to varied types of information that may be exchanged in learning processes.

(3) Individual and Collective Learning

The move from considering individual processing of information to considering group information processing is linked to the ‘information age’ (Hinsz et al., 1997: 43). In a time of increased information, information processing requires more individuals to work together. In studies of political and organisational learning, the study of ‘micro’ individual learning and ‘macro’ organisational learning have often been kept separate. However, “all learning takes place inside individual human heads; an organization learns in only two ways: (a) by the learning of its members, or (b) by ingesting new members who have knowledge the organization didn't previously have” (Simon, 1991: 125). It is important to thus clearly understand how the learning in individual party members’ heads can be translated to the learning of a political party as a collective body.

The micro/macro distinction in learning is widespread. For example, micro-level political socialization research stems from the psychological tradition; macro-socialization on the other hand considers how institutions socialize their parts (Checkel, 2005). Rather than artificially separating the two, organizational theorists reckon that learning occurs across different levels of analysis. Within the same context, individuals, small groups, organizations, and networks can all display learning. Different levels of learning are linked by social processes of knowledge creation and dissemination (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013: 486).

That is, “what is stored in any one head in an organisation may not be unrelated to what is stored in other heads” (Simon, 1991: 125). Individuals thus play a role in organisational learning. However, it is only through collective interpretation and decision making that a party can *collectively* implement learning (Crossan et al., 1999: 525). My study bridges the ‘micro-level’ (individual actors’ information processing), the ‘meso-level’ (the increase of knowledge within organizations), and the networked level (movement of knowledge between organizations) (Moyson et al., 2017: 162).

I recognize that learning cannot be immediately extrapolated from the individual to the party (Dodgson, 1993: 384). Organizations are important in information interpretation and integration due to their ability to 'preserve knowledge, behaviours, mental maps, norms and values over time' (Daft and Weick, 1984: 285). Whereas an individual interprets information into their own cognitive maps, an organization integrates competing individual and sub-group interpretations; members negotiate interests in order to come to a common interpretation (Choo, 1996: 337-338). Political party learning thus progresses along a process of negotiation from the individual to the organizational level. Information becomes collectivized to the party level, and ultimately to the transnational party level. The following section argues that this processual, stage wise approach is the most useful way of studying learning in transnational political parties.

(4) Processes and Outcomes of Learning

There is a division between those who see learning as a process and those who see it as an outcome. In this thesis, I emphasize the process of learning and see explicit change as simply one possible outcome of a learning process. By doing so, I recognise that learning may result in an altered outcome but does not have to produce a "end" or observable action (Bomberg, 2007: 263; Radaelli, 1995: 162). A process-based understanding of learning provides scope to recognise non-learning, arrested learning, and non-explicit learning.

I argue that detailing the process of information exchange provides more convincing evidence of learning than focusing on behavioural change. A study of behavioural outcomes in parties would struggle to avoid 'false positives,' when policies become more similar without learning and information exchange (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013: 485). Learning may occur without easily observable lessons, particularly in political parties which have relatively few 'position documents' to show change over time. Outcomes that look like learning—the

convergence of policies, for example—might occur but not reflect knowledge acquisition and adaptation. In these cases, false positives may occur (Biegelbauer, 2016: 130).

Outcome-focused approaches to learning emphasize the 'measurable' outcomes of learning (Akbar, 2003: 2001). In a political party context, outcomes could be observed as changed policies or strategies in policy programmes or public statements. However, interactions within EFA may affect parties in less observable ways. For example, party learning may lead to new skills, increased certainty in an existing policy, avoidance of a choice (negative learning), or a delayed policy change. Many of these consequences of interactions in EFA are best captured by focusing on the process of information exchange rather than behavioural outcomes of learning.

This explicit understanding that learning can be both an active process (verb) and a consequential outcome (object) ensures that the study of the 'lessons' does not overtake the study of 'learning' (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 600). This thesis is primarily a study of learning, the verb, rather than learning, the object. To identify whether learning occurs in the transnational party network, I trace the process of information exchange between individuals and member parties in the TNP. This is the most appropriate approach to answering my question, because the question emphasizes the complex consequences of interaction rather than assuming a singular object or policy area.

1.4 A Political Party Learning Framework

In this chapter, I have reviewed the difficulties of defining transnational political parties and employed a network approach to emphasize the relational, heterarchical nature of the TNP which reflects insights from policy, transnational advocacy, and organisational network literatures. Drawing on existing literature linking learning and networks, I proposed that the process of

learning provides a useful way to analyse information exchange within the transnational political party. As such, my question is:

> Do interactions within the European Free Alliance network generate nationalist and regionalist party learning? If so, to what extent? If not, why not?

Learning in this case will be defined as both an individual and collective endeavour and it will be conceptualized predominantly as a process of cognition. This progresses through three main stages: information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation. Each stage also progresses information from the individual towards the collective. In this section, I will first describe each stage, before providing a table to summarize this political party learning approach.

(1) Stages of Learning

I separate the process of learning into three steps. The identification of a 3-step pattern has been prevalent in both political and organisational learning literature. For example, Rose's (1993) lesson drawing moves from 'searching' to 'modelling' to 'emulating,' Sabatier's policy-oriented learning (1988) moves from 'research' to 'analytical debate' to 'implementation,' and May's (1992) definition of political learning moves from 'experience' to 'evaluation' to 'policy change.' Huber's analysis of organisational learning suggests four steps: acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and storing of information (1991: 90). Dunlop and Radaelli identify the acquisition, translation and dissemination of information (2016: 111). Bringing together these various conceptualizations, I identify three steps to the learning process: information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation.

Information acquisition occurs at the point of "supply" of information which policy makers process (Workman et al., 2009). The supply of information may come through an active learning process of 'searching,' but it may also occur

more passively, for example as part of a socialization process which inducts actors into the norms of a community (Rose, 1993: 3; Checkel, 2005: 804). TNP member party elites may actively seek out other parties with expertise on a specific policy area. However, they may also pick up information through collective social interactions (at annual General Assembly, for example) or through more distant means (Twitter, Facebook). In the initial transmittal of information, it is important to recognize that there are both 'exporters' and 'importers'; learning may be induced by either or both (Bomberg, 2007: 256).

Information interpretation is "the process through which information is given meaning" (Daft and Weick, 1984: 294). In the case of learning, this means giving the information meaning both in its original context (for example, considering its context, success, aims, etc.) and adapting that piece of information to the learner's context. The interpretative process is often characterized by a bounded rationality, in which policy makers rely on cognitive short cuts and are limited by their pre-existing biases (Meseguer, 2006: 40). Psychologically, the individual's interpretation of information allows them to rectify a 'discontinuity in self' caused by a proposed new way of thinking or behaving (Boyd and Fales, 1983: 111-112).

Organisationally, the move from individual to collective interpretation is "the process of translating events and developing shared understandings" (Daft and Weick, 1984: 286). One piece of information may be given one or many interpretations by an organization and its members (Huber, 1991: 102). The collective process of interpretation is a process of negotiation, made necessary because parties have dispersed power. Rather than the 'raw exercise of power,' to substantiate a change in party policy, strategy or norms, elites must convince others of their position (Sabatier, 1988: 152). Huber argues that learning becomes more extensive when "occurs when more of the organization's components obtain this knowledge and recognize it as potentially useful" (1991: 90). As such, in this party learning framework I

consider that individual interpretation is a step further along the learning process than acquisition, and then again that collective learning is again one step further.

Information implementation occurs when a decision is made that draws on information from the preceding stages. This decision may have a behavioural outcome or may simply be about a way of thinking, arguing, or understanding. That is, “learning may result in new and significant insights and awareness that dictate no behavioural change” (Friedlander, 1983: 194). In the case studies that follow this theoretical framework, information implementation has myriad faces. Implementation of learning may alter policy or strategy choices, their framing or argumentation on an issue, or a party’s strategy or policy stance. Individuals may implement information in their personal behaviour/choices within the party and the party may also change its collective policy/strategy to implement acquired information. Notably, implementation is not the ‘ultimate’ end of learning. Rather, learning is a process that occurs along all three stages.

Finally, there is a fourth step, institutionalization, but this will not play a role in this study. Institutionalization occurs at the network/systemic level. It would occur when the transnational political party routinizes certain behaviours, beliefs and norms/values (Marsh and Smith, 2000: 6). Given the focus of my question on the TNP’s member parties rather than its supra-national entity, this institutionalization step will not be discussed further. However, in order to show the complete range of processes that occur in organisational and political learning processes, it has been included in the party learning framework below.

Drawing on Crossan et al.’s 1999 table on the organizational learning processes, I have integrated each stage of learning with the actors that take part in each. This can be seen in Table 1.1 (below). This transnational party learning framework will structure my investigation of whether member parties learn in the TNP network. The table considers the interaction and transition

from individual to collective learning, the stepwise nature of information processing, and the output of each stage of learning. This table is proposed as a preliminary framework of the political party learning process which will be refined through this thesis.

Table 1.1 Party Learning in the Transnational Party Network

Actor	Stage of Learning	Output
Individual	Information Acquisition	New piece of information retained.
	Interpretation	Integration of information into own beliefs/context.
Party	Collective Interpretation	Shared understanding of information and its meaning in party context.
	Implementation	Change of behaviour/belief.
Transnational Party	Institutionalization	Routinization of member parties' learning through TNP behaviours, policies, and norms/values.

This processual, multi-level framework will provide structure to this thesis. It allows me to question whether and to what extent political parties learn in the transnational party network. It privileges understanding the diversity of learning outcomes above a succinct 'yes or no' understanding of whether learning happens.

However, there are some remaining questions about the shape of political party learning in the TNP network: Which parties are more likely to learn/teach? How might different types of parties learn in different ways? Why do some parties not learn? These questions will be unpacked through the identification of key contextual factors.

Variations in the process of learning could be based in the characteristics of individual actors, parties, relationships (ties) between parties, and the structure of the network. This builds on the foundations of learning reviewed in this chapter and also tap into a thread of literature about why individuals and organizations struggle to learn (Easterby-Smith, 1997: 1089). I identify five key contextual factors which would affect learning: electoral success, governing responsibility, party centralization, key entrepreneurs, and issue contestation.

(2) Electoral Success

A party's electoral success is relevant to whether a member party learns, because it shapes what information is valuable and worthy of exchange. In organisational learning, social hierarchies lead to an emphasis on the knowledge of those with more power (Bunderson and Reagans, 2011: 1189). Studies of policy learning recognise that there are 'exporters' and 'importers' of learning and that this differentiation is dependent on power. A networked policy process might be more heterarchical, but interactions between actors 'often reflect some of the same competitive struggles and disparities as do traditional modes of policy-making' (Bomberg, 2007: 263). In addition to the perceived, social success of an actor, specific policy choices may be seen as successful. Policy success and the clear demonstration/perception of that success facilitate policy learning (Shipan and Volden, 2008: 842).

Electoral results are a useful measure of success in the transnational political party network. In organisational networks, the main outcome of interest is performance. For political parties, performance is tested in elections. In one study of policy learning, which has both a political and policy component, political outcomes were measured by looking at electoral support (Gilardi, 2010). Electoral support often carries other associated types of power, such as 'epistemic power' (the ability to develop technical or strategic knowledge) (Sikkink, 2009: 240). As such, when a political party is electorally successful,

its partners may perceive that party to have useful knowledge. As such, electorally successful parties are likely to be perceived as useful transmitters of information. Organisations experiencing failure are more likely to actively earn than those experiencing success (Levy, 1994: 305).

However, electorally successful parties may also have less incentive to receive information from other parties in the TNP network. Electorally successful parties are likely to have less dependence on outside resources, such as those offered by the TNP. Electoral success conveys resource independence and informational resources in networks (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993: 446). Furthermore, electorally successful parties are also less likely to have other parties to look up to. On the other hand, less electorally successful parties are incentivized to seek information because observed failure of existing policies is also likely to spur a process of experimentation and information seeking (Hall, 1993: 291). As such, I expect those parties with less electoral support to learn from those with more electoral success. I also expect parties with high electoral success to be less likely to learn.

(3) Governing responsibility

Governing responsibility may intervene in the relationship between the party and the transnational political party. Becoming a party of government offers political elites alternate routes to European level information and increases domestic resources. Furthermore, being in Government increases political constraints which may make it more difficult to alter policies.

As noted in the introduction, for EFA members, relationships within the EFA are often one of the best ways to access the EU institutions due to their inability to access state-wide resources. When a party achieves a governing position, they may be able to access some European institutions without EFA. For example, regional offices in Brussels offer regions (and the political parties who control them) a chance to seek information from the Commission and other

Brussels-based actors, to lobby and to compete for resources. Through Brussels offices, regional policy makers can contact other regional offices directly (Hooghe and Marks, 1996: 86). Regional representations are “formidable information gatherers” and in this role, they feed sub-state governments that are ‘hungry for’ information (Marks et al., 1996: 182-183).

Governing responsibility also gives parties more domestic informational resources. Political parties have become increasingly close to the state. Gaining governing responsibility enhances this closeness to the state by providing parties with more staff, funding, and methods to communicate with the public (Katz and Mair, 1994: 11). Being in government enhances access to state resources. Parties in government can give direction to civil servants, and hire advisory staff, as well as spreading information through the official modes of communication of their regional government/assembly. Party elites see public office roles as highly valuable places and seek to progress their political careers by accessing these resources and roles (Müller, 2000). With access to public office and the resultant staff and informational resources, political party elites may have less need for the TNP network as a way of finding or disseminating information.

Power in the regional government may also increase parties’ domestic political constraints. Engagement in the TNP may initially be politically legitimizing (DeWinter and Cachafeiro, 2002: 494). However, after gaining governing responsibility, TNP membership may be a liability. TNPs bring together a wide range of actors and governing parties may be negatively affected by some members. The European Free Alliance is mostly composed of centre or centre-left parties. However, it has included parties with more right-wing ideologies (for example, the Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie, the Lega Nord, or Süd-Tiroler Freiheit). To avoid reputational consequences, TNP members with governing responsibilities may distance themselves.

Governing responsibility will be indicated by the position of the member party in the regional government, although the level of devolution to the region is varied across cases. Parties may be the single governing party or a coalition partner in a regional government. Some EFA parties also have no governing responsibility and sit in opposition or have no elected members regionally. I expect that, given increased party resources and domestic constraints, parties with significant governing responsibility will be less likely to learn in the TNP network. Parties with little or no governing responsibility will be more likely to learn from other TNP member parties.

(4) Party Centralization

Information interpretation and negotiation within the political party conditions the process of moving learning from the individual to the collective. As such, I consider the internal structure of the political party as a contextual factor. It is notable that there is no 'optimal' structure for learning (Crona and Bodin, 2006). Rather than a direct relationship from network centralization to learning, centralization and decentralization lead to different types of learning outcome. The differences depend particularly on the way that information is distributed. I argue that there are three general types of political party structure: decentralization, structured decentralization, and centralization.

In the case of information flows, information is more easily disseminated in a centralized network (Schilling and Phelps, 2007: 1118). Ease of information exchange within a political party should ease development of collective interpretations and decision making. Organisational centralization occurs when "decision-making power is concentrated at the top levels of the organisation" (Caruana et al., 1998: 18). Concentrated decision making thus often reflects hierarchy in a party. Centralization increases the organisation's integration and its ability to perform tasks, but it may decrease the legitimacy if decisions are seen as too top-down (Sandström and Carlsson, 2008: 510, 517). When

moving learning from individual to collective interpretations, a party must reach an agreed collective interpretation. Information exchange and centralized control is likely to ease such processes of negotiation. As such, I expect that *centralized* parties will be more likely to develop collective interpretations and thus progress through the process of party learning.

However, organisational decentralization encourages individual autonomy and task specialization (Carroll and Burton, 2000: 323-324). Task specialization encourages information seeking and allows for the cross-fertilization of ideas which can contribute to innovation (Pierce and Delbecq, 1976: 27-28). The differentiation of tasks also provides opportunities for less elite actors to be involved and contribute new ideas to a party (Shane, 1992: 32). Decentralized networks incorporate party members who are less well-connected but who, through their marginality, may generate policy change (Freeman, 2006: 373). A decentralized network provides for more individual autonomy, specialization, and novelty/marginality. By allowing more individual distinctiveness, I expect that *decentralized* parties are more likely to have individuals who acquire new information.

Centralization and decentralization are not absolute categories. If a party's decentralized nature is differentiated by design, it is more likely to transmit information across its sectors (Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011: 1128). Parties may design their structures to be decentralized to specialize sub-groups based around territories or policy areas. When tasks become more complex, disaggregation and decentralization allow organisations to efficiently seek and process information. 'Smaller, self-contained units' deal with complexity, but to lead to policy outcomes these units must be integrated (Carroll and Burton, 2000: 332). This disaggregation of decision making to specialized sub-groups and the centralization of macro-level decisions has been described by innovation researchers as the balance between 'local density' and 'global efficiency' or the trade-off between 'specialization' and 'integration' (Schilling

and Phelps, 2007: 1124; Waterman et al., 1980: 19). *Structured decentralization* may allow for the balance between the discovery and acquisition of new information and the integration of those ideas by central elite.

Parties' centralization will be analysed both through a section of each interview which asks respondents to describe the party's decision-making processes and by triangulation of this information with parties' official structures. Formal decision-making procedures may be preceded or overruled by informal decision-making forums; as such, it is important to consider individuals' experiences of party decision making. In centralized parties, decisions are likely to occur in small executive boards or be driven by a small group of elite actors. Structured decentralized parties will disaggregate decision-making processes into smaller sub-groups, perhaps by policy area. In decentralized parties, individual party members will have a large amount of input into policy making.

(5) Key Entrepreneurs

Previous factors focused on the role of the member parties' structure or characteristics. However, as previously emphasized, individuals play an important role in learning. The cognition and skill of an individual is needed to begin the learning process by acquiring information. Each actor may have a different 'cognitive style' which alters their acquisition, interpretation and organisation of information (Hayes and Allinson, 1998: 851). I identify the presence of key 'policy entrepreneurs' as a possibly influential factor the learning process.

Policy entrepreneurs are people who seek to initiate policy change through activities such as "identifying problems, shaping the terms of policy debates, networking in policy circles, and building coalitions" (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996: 423). These individuals are usually envisioned as part of a public policy network. However, promoting policy change, building networks, and defining

problems are also roles taken by members and elites of political parties. Hanley, in his 2008 study of transnational political parties, identified ‘entrepreneurs’ as the ‘pace-setters’ of the TNP. It is important to note that the key entrepreneur for party learning in a TNP would play an active, progressive role both in their own region and in the TNP network, thus bridging both venues.

The presence of key entrepreneurs in a political party would contribute to learning by seeking out new policy ideas, which they may draw from transnational sources. Policy entrepreneurs are involved in idea generation, most of which is developed from a ‘scanning of the environment’ (Roberts and King, 1991: 159). Although based in the member party (at the state level), the entrepreneur would use transnational networks to seek out policy innovations, to gain credibility, and to develop arguments used to convince policy makers (Mintrom, 1997: 739). Entrepreneurs may also play a facilitating role in later steps of learning. The individual entrepreneur’s ability to understand the breadth and political climate of the network may improve information interpretation in cases where information is diffuse or uncodified (Henneberg et al., 2010: 355-357). Their leadership in the domestic political party may also allow them to negotiate and encourage a collective interpretation.

The presence of a key entrepreneur will be indicated by self-reported level of engagement, other respondents’ reports about an individual’s role, and ethnographic observations of individuals in multilateral environments. I expect that parties with a key entrepreneur in the TNP network would be more likely to learn while parties without active entrepreneurs are less likely to learn.

(6) Issue Contestation

Finally, I consider the contextual factor of issue contestation which taps into the ideological dimension of learning. Issue contestation affects the object, the ‘what’ dimension of learning. Issue contestation is the extent to which an issue is debated, undecided, and contentious in a political party. In policy areas with

a high level of uncertainty, whether as a result of conflict, new developments, or absence of evidence, policy makers may “look to experiments elsewhere” (Stone, 1999: 54). The search for policies from elsewhere may thus be spurred on by dissatisfaction with existing policies, the emergence of new issues, or intra-party disagreement over policy position.

The opposite may also be true. Lack of issue contestation is likely to lead to lack of learning. Where a belief is deeply embedded in a political party, what Sabatier calls a ‘core belief,’ it is likely to be protected by members of the party. Core beliefs often trigger “ego-defense, peer-group and organizational forces [that] create considerable resistance to change even in the face of countervailing empirical evidence or internal inconsistencies” (Sabatier, 1988: 147). Hall (1993) differentiates between the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ of a policy. He argues that the underlying policy goal is less likely to change whereas instruments or strategies to achieve that policy are more likely to display elements of learning (Bennett and Howlett, 1992: 285). The more core or deep the belief, the less likely that belief will be altered by learning.

The issue of uncertainty is what Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) call problem tractability. They argue that tractability also affects the *extent* and character of learning that occurs. Problems with low uncertainty may occur through more “technical or technocratic approaches” while those that have a high level of uncertainty may affect “‘contested boundaries’ that become ultimately political” (Dunlop and Radaelli: 2013, 602). Levels of uncertainty around a policy will be measured through a section of the interview which asks respondents about their party’s priorities and policy development. Core and contested policy areas for each party will also be further identified through analysis of parties’ manifestos and secondary sources such as newspaper articles.

These contextual factors are not mutually exclusive. For example, a more successful party is more likely to have governing responsibility. A party with

centralized structures is more likely to have low issue contestation across all policy areas. However, it is still useful to consider these dimensions separately. Disaggregating the dimensions allows us to see how different aspects of member party engagement in the TNP could affect learning: the characteristics of the party, its elites, its policy platforms, and patterns of success within the TNP. I hope to clarify which variables are more influential on learning outcomes by studying several different European Free Alliance member parties.

In each empirical chapter, I consider how the party performs on these contextual factors before considering whether or not they learn. This will allow me to highlight the differences and similarities between parties that do (or do not) learn. Theoretically, I return to these contextual factors and the three-stage framework of party learning in Chapter Eight. After applying the framework to four different parties, I will conclude this thesis by reflecting on theoretical adjustments that might streamline and clarify my approach to political party learning.

Chapter Two: Research Design

In the previous chapter, I developed a political party learning framework that brought together existing literature on transnational political parties, networks, and learning. I posited that political parties can learn from one another through three steps of information processing. In a transnational party network, like the European Free Alliance, information moves from one party to another and then from individual to collective knowledge within that receiving political party. I also incorporated five contextual factors and proposed that these factors would condition how different parties experience the learning process. The rest of this thesis will seek to test the party learning framework by applying it to four different cases. In this chapter, I set out the process through which the framework is tested including the choice of comparison, case selection, and data collection and analysis.

I employ a qualitative comparative research design. The comparison between different member parties of the European Free Alliance allows me to test whether and to what extent EFA's member political parties learn from each other. By comparing different parties' experiences, I can delve into how contextual factors specific to each party affect their patterns of learning. I study parties through semi-structured elite interviews, ethnographic observation, and relevant primary and secondary source documents.

The first section of this chapter justifies the use of a small sample comparison and explains the choice of these specific political parties as cases from the European Free Alliance. Four member parties of EFA from different regions in Europe are used as the main cases: the Frisian National Party (FNP), the Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), and the Scottish National Party (SNP). A fifth regionalist and nationalist party, the Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (PDeCAT) in Catalonia acts as a within-

region comparative case. I compare PDeCAT with ERC and focus on the role of the TNP, because PDeCAT is not a member of EFA.

The second section of this chapter reviews my methods of data collection and analysis. I discuss the process of conducting elite interviews, which are my main source of data. This discussion includes a justification of the choice of interview data, consideration of the difficulties of this method, and a detailed explanation of the choices made in doing interviews. I also conducted four ethnographic observations and collected primary and secondary source documents as a method of triangulation. Finally, I discuss how I analyzed the resultant data using non-coding qualitative content analysis and social network analysis.

2.1 Qualitative Comparative Research and Case Selection

Using a comparative approach to the party learning framework ensures that I can capture the full range of experiences of learning and non-learning. Rather than focusing solely on the binary question of learning (do they learn?), comparison between the cases also allows me to explore the conditions under which parties are more or less likely to learn. Conditions that are likely to affect information exchange in parties have been theorized as contextual factors in Chapter One. In this section, I contextualize my research within the realm of comparative political research and then justify my choice of four EFA member parties.

(1) Qualitative Comparison

This thesis follows the comparative tradition of using contextualized, qualitative comparison of empirical cases to generate, test, and revise theory. Theory building from qualitative case study research may initially yield findings that seem overly complicated due to the amount of detail and data generated. However, theory generation from cases also allows for more creative insight, measurable concepts, and empirically valid theory (Eisenhardt, 1989: 546-

547). Privileging creativity and theory generation over parsimony is appropriate in this thesis given the explorative nature of my topic. In this thesis's conclusion, I suggest avenues for future research and possible conceptual adjustments to further streamline the theoretical framework.

In this thesis, I perform both a within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons. Within-case analysis requires careful description of each case which "allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before investigators push to generalize patterns across cases" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 540). This within case storytelling, in this thesis, particularly allows me to argue whether or not and to what extent each political party displays learning from their EFA partners. Tracing the learning process within the four different cases leads to clearer abstraction. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) argue that, "multiple cases create more robust theory because the propositions are more deeply grounded in varied empirical evidence" (27). Multiple cases allow for 'theoretical elaboration' which is particularly useful in these early explorative stages of developing the learning framework.

I pair within-case explorations of the transnational party networking and learning process within cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis allows me to reflect on how party-specific factors alter party learning process. Each case is analysed in individual structured empirical chapters. These follow a parallel format. Each empirical chapter introduces the party, examines how they perform on the five contextual factors, shows their relationships in EFA, and asks whether parties display the three stages of the party learning framework. In my concluding chapter, I compare the experiences of party learning in the four case studies to reflect on each proposed contextual factor.

(2) Case Selection

Comparison requires identifying one or multiple cases. A case is "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar)

units" (Gerring, 2004: 342). The question of this thesis is: do interactions between regionalist and nationalist parties in the European Free Alliance generate member party learning? The unit of analysis is thus the domestic political party. The universe of cases is clearly defined by membership of the European Free Alliance. There are 36 full member parties of EFA that could serve as cases. However, I ultimately choose a small sample size (four cases) to analyse in this thesis.

Small sample, qualitative case studies are useful, because of "their detailed knowledge of processes…considered as particularly useful for the discovery of social mechanisms" (Della Porta, 2008: 211). Qualitative studies thus allow me to trace the social process of party learning. Furthermore, small N case studies are more able to bridge levels of analysis, from individual to international. The level of detail provided by studying relatively few cases is essential in studying political parties in the European context (Coppedge, 1999: 474)

There is debate over how many cases are useful for theory generation (Eisenhardt, 1991; Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). In qualitative, comparative research, it is important to balance the quality of data with the ability to control for variations between cases. In this research, the quality of the 'stories' told is privileged. This thicker qualitative comparison allows for creativity in the initial stages of developing the party learning concept. However, as Lijphart argued, "any enlargement of the sample, however small, improves the chances of instituting at least some control" (1971: 686). Given the number of contextual factors identified in Chapter One, I seek to identify as large as possible a number of cases to study variation across these factors within the scope of this thesis. I identified that it would be possible to sufficiently study four cases within the word count and time span (3 years) of this PhD.

I chose four cases from four regions and member states of the European Union. These are the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland, the UK;

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) in Catalonia, Spain; the Fryske Nasjonale Partij or Frisian National Party (FNP) in Friesland, the Netherlands; and the Union Démocratique Bretonne or Breton Democratic Union (UDB) in Brittany, France.

In order to reduce complexity and interconnectedness, I chose four parties that act in different states and regions. Too many interconnections between cases may lead to confusion and overstatement of conclusions (Snyder, 2001: 95). The focus of this thesis is on interactions between parties acting in different states, at the transnational level, rather than within states.

I also chose parties that had sufficient similarities and differences. The similarities allow me to consider commonalities in the process of learning. These four parties are similar in some important ways: they are all established sub-state nationalist and regionalist parties and members of EFA. These parties have been consistently active domestically and longstanding members of the European Union and of EFA. The parties were founded in 1934 (SNP), 1931 (ERC), 1964 (UDB), and 1962 (FNP). They have established structures and clear positions in their domestic party system. The parties joined EFA in 1981 (FNP), 1987 (UDB) and 1989 (SNP, ERC). Their time as part of the EFA network is analogous. All parties have taken part in EFA throughout its period of professionalization and deeper integration. As such, when studying whether and how parties learn, their length of membership or establishment shouldn't be an intervening factor in the findings.

Another factor which is relatively consistent across the four cases is their socio-economic policies. All parties are all centre-left to left wing parties along the left/right ideological scale. We can compare their relative positioning using Massetti and Schakel's 2015 classifications of parties' positioning in regional election years. Their three-class categorization of parties' positioning shows that the UDB is a clearly left party (2.00), the FNP is a left-leaning centrist party

(3.30), ERC is a left party (2.56), and the SNP is a left party (2.67) (Massetti and Schakel, 2015: 876-877).

The parties do differ on their autonomy goals. The SNP and ERC are actively independence-seeking parties, whereas both the UDB and the FNP are seeking more power for their regions short of independence. Despite heterogeneity, some scholars have argued that that parties' claims for autonomy and self-government underpin the 'party family' (Gomez-Reino, 2017: 5; Dandoy, 2010). Massetti and Schakel have classified sub-state nationalist and regionalist parties dichotomously, distinguishing between moderate and radical claims (2016: 63). As these accounts suggest, sub-state nationalist and regionalist parties are joined by a commitment to decentralization, but these claims are heterogeneous.

Studying these parties through the lens of the European Free Alliance provides an interesting answer to the problem of their heterogeneity on autonomy policy. EFA defines itself by its commitment to self-determination and party staff explicitly recognise that this term refers to a *spectrum* of policies rather than one unified policy goal. As Hepburn argued, most "stateless nationalist and regionalist parties have interpreted the principle of self-determination to mean different degrees of autonomy. This can be seen as a pragmatic response to the political spaces created by changing state and supranational opportunity structures" (Hepburn, 2009: 484). While the *extent* of parties' autonomist claims differs, all the parties in this thesis agree on an underpinning value of territorial empowerment. Whether or not one agrees that these parties form a cohesive 'party family,' their membership within EFA creates a *de facto* unity which requires some interaction (at the very least at annual General Assemblies).

Parties also vary in significant ways. These variances add a valuable dimension to my exploration of learning. I have selected these parties in order to understand how different party characteristics affect learning. As reviewed

in Chapter One, the contextual factors I am particularly interested in are: electoral success, governing responsibility, party organisational centralization, presence of key entrepreneurs, and issue contestation. These factors are not dichotomous. Furthermore, they may vary within a party over time or in different aspects of decision-making or policy areas. The table below provides a brief summary of how each party performs on the contextual factors. These contextual factors and parties' positioning will be explored in a more nuanced way in each empirical chapter.

Table 2.1: Contextual Factors Across Cases

	Electoral success	Governing responsibility	Party centralization	Key entrepreneurs	Issue contestation
SNP	High	High	High	Low	Low
ERC	High	High	Medium	High	Low
UDB	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
FNP	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	High

I have sought to select cases which allow me to explore the effect of these key contextual factors. For example, two cases (ERC and the SNP) are among the most electorally successful and responsible parties in EFA, whereas two are less successful and have limited governing responsibility (UDB and FNP). Table 2.1 shows the varied constellations of characteristics for each party. These variances across the cases will provide for fruitful exploration of the effect of party context on their interactions within and learning from EFA.

I remain open minded to other dimensions of variation between the cases that were not been identified prior to the analysis that might affect learning. Through a grounded and open perspective on the cases, if other differing factors affect

the learning process, I will seek to identify them through a thick descriptive analysis of the cases.

In addition to the four main cases, in the Catalan case, I also more briefly examine a fifth case, the Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català or Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT). This allows me to consider how membership of EFA shapes parties' interactions at the European level. My question makes an implicit assumption that member parties of EFA will interact with one another and that they will be more likely to interact with one another than with members of other transnational political parties. By studying PDeCAT, I examine this assumption.

PDeCAT is a stateless nationalist party seeking the independence of Catalonia. However, PDeCAT (and its predecessor party) has long been a member of another transnational political party: the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).[3] The predecessor to PDeCAT, Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), was very briefly a member of the European Free Alliance from 1981 to 1987. However, the CDC/PDeCAT has been a member of ALDE since 1987. The length of PDeCAT's relationship to ALDE is analogous to the time that my cases have been members of the European Free Alliance.

I compare PDeCAT's transnational relationships to ERC's relationships. ERC and PDeCAT both act within Catalonia and have a number of similarities, including the independence goal. They work together in the Catalan Government and have run on joint electoral platforms. Given their similarities, by comparing their transnational relationships, I can analyse whether their respective TNP membership affects interactions between European political parties.

[3] On October 27, 2018, ALDE voted to expel PDeCAT. Given this is after the fieldwork and research period of this thesis, it does not substantively change my findings. However, PDeCAT respondents' discomfort with the ALDE group is addressed in Chapter Six.

These cases thus vary sufficiently to allow me to study multiple facets of political party interaction and learning in the European Free Alliance. Beyond these theoretical dimensions of interest, the four regions and five parties that I have chosen to study are also practically feasible to explore within the three-year time span of this PhD. They are accessible from Edinburgh, which allowed me to visit most regions twice. Both Catalan parties and the SNP have significant secondary literature which complemented interview data. The Frisian and Breton parties, albeit less well studied, were forthcoming in providing documentary data. A timely and deeper analysis was eased by my ability to read and speak Dutch, French and English. Furthermore, this thesis thus provides both additional information on high profile parties and contributes to scholarly understanding of some smaller stateless nationalist parties.

This section has justified the use of a qualitative, small sample size case study. I argue that this approach allows me to consider each party within its own context before analysing across cases and seeking generalizations. The four cases selected have sufficient similarities to be comparable but also differ significantly. These differences will be useful when exploring the effect of parties' context on their learning and relationships in EFA.

I provide a contextualization of the party being studied in each chapter. Before enumerating their relationships in EFA and whether/how they learn, I introduce the party and discuss how it performs on the identified contextual factors. This contextualized, in-depth knowledge stems from qualitative data, including interviews, ethnographic observation, and documents.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

There is no perfect source of data, particularly when studying a relational and often private process such as learning. As emphasized in the last chapter, learning is both a process and outcome, both collective and individual, and has many different disciplinary facets. The methods used to study learning can be

equally diverse. Bennett and Howlett wrote: “Policy studies that wish to explore the extent and effect of learning have a dilemma: to analyze historical cases and rely on a written, and inevitably, selective record; or to study contemporary cases and rely more on elite interviewing, with all its attendant problems” (1992: 290). In this thesis, I choose the latter and use elite interviews with members of EFA parties as my main source of data.

This choice of method should be guided not just by theory but by the subject at hand. As described in chapter one, transnational political parties are elite and parties’ relationships are often informal. The TNP is a relatively recent phenomenon and many parts of the TNP have only become more powerful since the changes to regulations in 2004. Relatively few documents are publicly available to study the TNP and the secondary literature is correspondingly sparse. Since the object of study is not well documented, informal, and contemporary, I chose to use interviews with contemporary EFA and EFA member party elites as the main source of data. In this section, I justify the reliance on interview data and detail how I undertook the data collection. I also review the two complementary sources of data used in this thesis: participant observation and documents (primary and secondary). Then I describe the way that data was analyzed qualitatively and using a social network analysis approach.

(1) Elite Interviews

Interviews are the most appropriate way to study learning, particularly in political parties which do not publicly document their policy making processes. Even in cases where policy decision making is public (i.e. in conference debates), the learning process may precede or be obscured from these forums. Learning is often ‘hidden from the eye of the observer,’ which necessitates an in-depth, limited case study (Biegelbauer, 2016: 130). Furthermore, I study learning as a process. Processes underpinning party policy choices are much

less likely to be documented in public documents such as party manifestos or speeches. They can only be understood by speaking directly with party elites who can express the 'why' and 'how' of party change (Paterson and Sloam, 2006: 41).

I conducted 53 semi-structured interviews. Of these, 52 respondents are catalogued in Appendix One at the end of this thesis. One respondent asked to remain entirely anonymous and is thus not included in this appendix. All quotations throughout this thesis have been anonymized. I interviewed 9 members of the FNP, 10 members of the UDB, 10 members of ERC, 5 members of PDeCAT, and 15 members of the SNP. I also interviewed four EFA staff members and two non-party affiliated Catalan civil society members.[4]

The number of respondents necessary in a qualitative study is contested and often linked to the concept of saturation. In this case, I sought to achieve data saturation, which is the point at which interviews no longer provide new variations on the theme being studied (Guest et al., 2006: 65). In more general terms, the concept of saturation asks: does conducting more interviews lead to more or new insights? The number of interviews conducted was guided by this principle, and by the time and resource constraints of the study. Although there are always further insights to be gleaned depending on how fine-grain the analysis conducted is, I found that 8 to 10 interviews per political party was sufficient. In the case of the SNP, I conducted more than this saturation point. My base in Edinburgh eased the interview process. Furthermore, the SNP is by far the largest party of the cases. More interviews were needed to get a wider and representative range of perspectives.

With the exception of one interview, all conversations were conducted face to face. It is undeniably more efficient to speak to interview respondents using tele-conferencing methods. I travelled to Friesland, Brittany, Catalonia,

[4] Some individuals are members of more than one party or category listed here.

Brussels, and across the United Kingdom to conduct interviews. This required significant time and resources. Additional fieldwork funding was provided by UACES, the academic association for Contemporary European Studies.

Despite the cost, conducting interviews in person was important to build up trust. One scholar noted that similarities between the respondent and interviewer may facilitate phone conversations (Stephens, 2007: 207). In my case, the exact opposite was true. Respondents often differed from me in age, language, culture, and status. Furthermore, respondents differed from one another in these dimensions. This meant that each of my interviews required significant adjustments in my approach. As such, I found that face-to-face interviewing was necessary in this project. Primarily, a face-to-face interview "affords the interviewer the opportunity to continually re-mould the interaction to their needs and interests through visual cues and small utterances" (Stephens, 2007: 211). I also worked across a number of political cultures in the Netherlands, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. Harvey (2011: 435) has argued that cultural differences are more easily bridged in person. Meeting respondents in person also allowed them to show me their places of work or activism. Often the respondent and I built up a rapport as they guided me through this space, whether it be their legislature or ordering in a different language at a restaurant. Respondents also often drew on documents (articles or books) in their offices to illustrate points.

Interviewing in-person made multi-lingual interviews easier to conduct. I did interviews in Dutch, French, and English. Interview respondents frequently drew parallels for me based on their understanding of my 'insider' position in their culture. In French interviews, for example, respondents assumed a basic understanding of the 'central' French state based on my time at a Parisian university. In Dutch interviews, respondents often drew parallels between Friesland and the peripheral Dutch region where I was born. Conducting interviews in a respondent's primary language allows respondents to express

themselves as clearly and accurately as possible. To maintain this accuracy, interview transcription and analysis were also done in the original language. Interview respondents' words were only translated when directly quoted in this thesis; all translations were done by me. Alternately, I had more difficulty in interviews with Catalan respondents, which were conducted primarily in English (with one in French). Unfortunately, limited resources hindered me from hiring interpreters in the Catalan case. Furthermore, "the presence of an interpreter may inhibit some interviewees from giving honest answers" (Mikecz, 2012: 489).

All interviews, except for two, were recorded for later transcription. This allowed me to rely less on my handwritten notes and to be more present and engaged in the interview. Transcriptions also provided scope for later analysis of detailed elements of the interview. For example, transcriptions were used to count references to other political parties for later use in social network analysis diagrams. Interviews lasted an average of 46 minutes per interview. The length of interviews ranges from 20 minutes to 1.5 hours. This variation in length was largely dependent on respondents' availability. In my experience, elected members often block their time in one-hour slots; I felt it important to limit the interview process to one hour to ensure access.

Odendahl and Shaw (2001) ask the important question on how 'elite' is defined and how elite respondents are selected in interview-based research. As they note, the category of elite is varied. While elites can be determined based on quantitative rankings, it is important to understand that the category is dependent on both social patterns of power and the theoretical perspective of the researcher. In my research, when selecting interview respondents, I paid attention to those who are central to the bodies I'm studying: domestic political parties and the European Free Alliance. I sought to achieve a sample of respondents who reflect the breadth of individuals in a political party and whose experiences are relevant and appropriate to the question.

To speak with a broad range of individuals in parties, I selected respondents from two key elements of parties: the “parliamentary party” and the “party organization.” As discussed in chapter one, despite the apparent democratization of political parties, the Parliamentary group and party organizational staff are still the key spaces within which policy processes and negotiation occur (Gauja, 2013: 19).

From the ‘parliamentary party’ side, in each case, I interviewed elected members and staff members working at different levels of government: local, regional and state-wide legislatures. I also emphasized speaking to party members/elected members that were central to key internal decision-making bodies. These bodies (variably named the ‘bureau,’ ‘hoofdbestuur,’ ‘national executive’) are central parts of the party’s organisational functions. Where accessible, I also sought to interview parties’ central staff members who are involved in policy making and manifesto drafting. Finally, to recognize the breadth of the party organisation, I interviewed at least one youth member from each political party studied in this thesis. Selection of interview respondents was also conditioned by access; not all politicians were responsive to requests for interviews. Nonetheless, I believe that the breadth of interviews across the EFA network ensures that a variety of perspectives are accounted for.

It is also important to consider respondents’ appropriateness to my question. As such, I sought out a number of interview respondents who had previously shown interest in EFA and European politics. For example, I interviewed elected members who had served on the Foreign Affairs/European Committees of their legislatures, party staff who had previously worked in international affair, or parties’ international spokespeople. At the TNP level, the European Free Alliance staff and organizational leadership is quite small. As such, it was possible to interview both the Director of EFA, its political adviser, and its Secretary General. However, I also spoke to respondents who did *not* interact at a European level. This was important to understand the breadth of

experiences in each party. The absence and presence of knowledge about the transnational level in different parties was instructive about the role of EFA domestically. My research asks how information *from European partners* is used in *domestic party choices*. As such, I mainly sought to speak to individuals from each member party who were involved in European affairs and/or internal party decision making forums.

Interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are open-ended "interview strategies in which the wording or order of the questions on the schedule can be altered in real time by the researcher" (Davies, 2001: 76). This flexibility allowed me to build a rapport with respondents by ensuring that I was an active and responsive participant. Semi-structured interviews tend to be more conversational. Analytically, this conversational nature allows the researcher to "get at the contextual nuance of response and to probe beneath the surface of a response to the reasoning and premises that underlie it" (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 674). Allowing respondents to delve into this underlying reasoning is important when researching learning, because learning is not only about the decision but *why* and *how* a decision was reached.

I began each interview by asking respondents to explain their own path into politics, their career progress, and motivations for being involved in their political party. This question serves two purposes. First, it allows the respondent to feel comfortable since "people find talking about themselves about as fascinating as any subject they know" (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 675). Second, it allows me to reflect on the role of individuals' characteristics in the learning process (particularly important in considering the role of entrepreneurs in the EFA). Then, respondents were asked to describe the priorities of their own party and its policy and strategy decision-making processes. Respondents were then asked about their relationship to other political parties in Europe and prompted to list their closest and most distant political party partners. Finally, I asked about their own experiences with the

European Free Alliance and how these affected them. While each interview included these elements, the order and emphasis of each part varied depending on the respondent.

There are difficulties with elite interviewing as a method. In this thesis, there are two main concerns with the interview method: the (dis)honesty of the respondent and concerns about the possibility of finding 'objective' truth through interviews. The first of these concerns is about what Morris calls the 'dishonest respondent.' This concern questions the accuracy of the data collected and builds on the assumption that the respondent will use an interview to promote themselves and in doing so, alter the narrative (Morris, 2009: 211-212).

The problem of the dishonest or self-aggrandizing respondent has been addressed in this research in two ways: by interviewing varied people from each party and by seeking additional documentary or observational data. Interview data "must be reinforced by other forms of empirical data or must be based upon a broad sample of interviews, all conducted with those who enjoyed equal access to the event or activity" (Lilleker, 2003: 212). For each case, I conduct a broad range of interviews with elites. While not all respondents hold the same level or responsibility, I also sought to interview multiple people from each category (i.e. two staff members, two elected members). I interviewed multiple respondents working on the same project or activity (for example, the FNP's sustainability project or the SNP's relationship with Catalonia). The empirical chapters compare respondents' perspectives and discuss how respondents' positioning might affect their experience of transnational networking/learning.

The second concern is about the difficulty of and questions about the ability to find 'truth.' That is, can interview respondents ever give us an 'objective' picture of the policy process? To what extent can interview data produce a truthful

picture? However, I argue that interviews will always produce a subjective account of events and subsequently argue that "elite interviewing should not be conducted with a view to establishing 'the truth', in a crude, positivist manner" (Richards, 1996: 200). I achieve a picture of how elites *perceive* party decisions, transnational interactions, and learning. I critically question respondents' claims of learning throughout the empirical chapters by interrogating these learning claims by cross-referencing sources of data, breaking learning down into different stages, and understanding the role of symbolic learning and emulation. I also understand learning as only one part of a policy decision making process. I seek to be explicit about the limits of 'truth' that can be achieved through interviews, but also believe that elites' perceptions and representations of their policy choices are important in themselves.

(2) Ethnographic Observation

In addition to interviews, I conducted ethnographic observations at four European Free Alliance organised events: the 2017 and 2018 EFA General Assemblies, the observation mission to the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, and a conference on sustainable energy in regions (co-organised with the FNP). Conducting observations allowed me to collect data without individual respondents' 'distorting lenses,' which make it difficult for them to accurately describe their social relationships (and other sensitive subjects such as power) (Becker and Geer, 1957: 30-31). Given that my question starts from the interaction between parties, it is important to experience and observe relationships in multilateral spaces.

Ethnography has previously and prominently been used in studying policy and political networks. Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes wrote *Understanding Governance* (1997) and *Governance Stories* (2006) in order to propose a more decentred way of studying politics. They promoted ethnography as a method,

particularly in studying networks. Ethnography allows researchers “to explore the beliefs and actions not only of politicians, civil servants, public sector managers, but also street-level bureaucrats, non-governmental actors and citizens. Ethnographers reconstruct the meanings of social actors by recovering other people’s stories” (Bevir and Richards, 2009: 11).

By conducting ethnographic observations, I access not only the visible and institutional actors in the EFA network but also those members that are more peripheral or informally engaged. I witnessed dynamics that are not explicitly named by interview respondents. For example, through observation, I was able to specifically understand the barrier implemented by linguistic and cultural differences that separate Eastern and Western European members. Through ethnography, I do not claim to provide a more objective story but rather a more contextualized and relational story. My interview respondents often acted as a guide through this space, but I was also able to build connections with members of EFA outside of my cases. This allowed me to get a better sense of EFA’s wider reach, and how the cases I study here fit into that network.

Two of my ethnographic observations were conducted at General Assemblies (GAs). The GA is seen as the key place for EFA networking, both through policy-oriented sessions and through informal networking. One EFA staff member noted: “Sometimes the motions and declarations are just the alibi for some to talk in the corridors on other topics” (Interview 10). The General Assembly brings together many different types of TNP actors in formal and informal interactions. It is organised by the EFA secretariat, political foundation (the Centre Maurits Coppetiers), and EFA youth board (EFAy). Each party must send a voting representative. As such, the GA is an ideal place at which to observe globally the dynamics of interactions within the TNP.

The Catalan referendum and the FNP sustainable energy conference meanwhile offered two alternate types of events. The first was more ad hoc,

politically charged and high visibility. Although there was an EFA-organised mission, there were also a lot of overlaps with events organised by the Catalan Government and organised in a more ad hoc manner through informal networks (WhatsApp groups, in particular). The second was more technical and the result of a longer-term collaborative and policy-oriented project. It incorporated both EFA members and policy-interested actors from Friesland.

In each observation, my role as a researcher was emphasized both by myself and by event organisers (for example, through an announcement at the opening of the General Assembly). All interactions witnessed in these situations will be imparted with a high level of anonymity. Few quotes are used from these observations, although some are drawn from fieldnotes. Rather than individual statements, the focus of observations was on structural and relational characteristics of the TNP network. I took notes throughout the observations in both formal and informal spaces. Reflective notes were also taken at the end of the day.

Ethically, I have ensured a high level of anonymity to individuals at each event. Policy makers and politicians are not generally vulnerable subjects, especially when observed in professional and public spaces like conferences. However, the Catalan referendum observation included more sensitive observations, such as moments of violence and intimidation. These incidents were not highly relevant to the subject of this thesis. Given the conflict that occurred, findings from the Catalan referendum observation are limited and more highly anonymized.

(3) Primary and Secondary Source Documents

Triangulation, as defined by Davies (2001) and Lilleker (2003), is the process of cross-referencing information received from interviews by comparing it with data available from first-hand accounts and secondary source material. These sources serve as data triangulation (adding ‘analytic density’) (Thurmond,

2001: 254). In order to study learning as a part of the policy process, documents are insufficient on their own. However, they may provide corroborating evidence of party choices or policy/strategy debates that confirm and reinforce data collected through interviews.

Party documents will be used in this thesis when necessary to provide context or background. This includes party manifestos, policy statements, elite speeches, press releases, and websites. Furthermore, I will also incorporate documents with direct relation to TNP interactions. The European Free Alliance has a number of publications, blogs, and news items that will be incorporated into the wider analysis of the behaviour of TNP interactions. Secondary sources will also be drawn on to substantiate contextual claims and understand the way that politicians present their policies and strategies to the public. These secondary sources are primarily newspaper articles which allow for corroboration and further evidence of the claims being made by interview respondents.

(4) Positionality

It is important to reflect on my position, particularly in the process of conducting interviews and observations. A researchers' position in relation to their subject is often phrased in terms of insider versus outsider status. The insider shares "the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants" whereas the outsider does not (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 55). The former is seen to provide access and build trust but may also make the researcher presumptuous; outsider status then is associated with allowing the researcher to be more clear-eyed (O'Connor, 2004: 169). Like others who have reflected on their positionality in elite interviewing, I found that one's position in the field often fluctuated. Positionality is conditional and contingent and can vary even within one interaction (O'Connor, 2004: 175). As one scholar eloquently stated,

“the research itself had also positioned me within the process, dismantling any preconceived notions of insider/outsider” (Desmond, 2004: 263).

My ability to move within the European Free Alliance network was never as a pure ‘participant’ nor as pure observer. My clear designation as a researcher gave me a certain outsider position. Furthermore, my American accent allowed me to avoid instant pigeon-holing within any of EFA’s member parties. It often emerged as a point of difference and discussion.

As most of my research focused on the ‘mother’ party of EFA (rather than on EFA Youth), my age also tended to differentiate me from my subjects. Numerous scholars have considered the role of age and gender in their research (for example Mukherjee, 2017; Tarrant, 2014; Figenschou, 2010). Experiences are very dependent on the subject of research and cultural context. However, researchers often note that gender and youth facilitate access by providing an image of ‘agreeability’ and a non-threatening positionality (Figenschou, 2010: 973). I found this was the case in my interviews as well. Although I sought to interview women in each of my cases, only fifteen of fifty-three interviews were with women. This reflects the persistent gender imbalances in Western European politics. When combined with my ‘insider’ knowledge, my youth, gender, and cultural positioning meant that people were often eager to explain their experiences to me.

However, my interviewing also built on some ‘insider’ characteristics. I shared some of their experiences, having worked at the Scottish Parliament for a Scottish National Party politician. I began fieldwork in June 2016 and continued interviews until late 2018. My familiarity with members of the EFA network grew over time. This affected my positionality and the openness of my respondents.

As Rhodes explained about his work in Whitehall, “My aim was to remain the outsider, but for lengthy on-site visits and extensive repeat interviews, you have to have a conversation and relate to the people around you. You are sucked

into events" (Rhodes, 2005: 22). I built up stronger networks in various sub-groups of EFA, particularly those that were senneing as fitting my personal position and characteristics. I developed closer personal relationships with young EFA members and those from the 'Celtic' and UK-based representations.

Walking the line between insider and outsider is a necessary trade off of the thick, rich description that one achieves through ethnography and extensive elite interviewing. Awareness and regular reflection on the insider/outsider positionality and its social context were a part of my analytical work in addition to triangulation with multiple sources of interviews and documentary sources.

(5) Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative data collection yields a significant amount of text, in the form of interview transcriptions, documents, and notebooks full of field notes. This data is "in detailed and micro form (e.g. accounts of experiences, descriptions of interchanges, observations of interactions, etc.)" and must be made coherent by the researchers (Spencer and Ritchie, 2002). In order to add coherence this data, I analyse the information through a non-coded qualitative content analysis (QCA).

Through QCA, I seek themes and patterns within each case and also conduct cross-case comparisons. Qualitative content analysis is a method of understanding the content and context of text. It "goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). Content analysis identifies themes or patterns within qualitative sources to break them down into more manageable, interpreted sets of data.

I have chosen not to formally code the data. In part, my choice of data and the open-ended approach to interviewing affect this choice of a qualitative, non-

coded analysis. The semi-structured nature of my interviews means that the data resists a strict coding mechanism. When conducting open-ended interviewing and analysing the resultant data:

> "the absence of closure limits one's capacity to impose powerful analytic or structuring techniques on the data. Unless responses are carefully coded to minimize information loss, the transformation of highly verbalized information into quantitatively useable data will lead to a sizeable missing data problem since even with a uniform stimulus people often talk about different things or use different frameworks" (Aberbach et al., 1975: 3).

My interview data was semi-structured. It was also cross-cultural and multi-lingual. Interviews were conducted in 3 different languages, in which words and concepts are not directly interchangeable, and four different political contexts. This variation in the content and context of data make it difficult and reductive to develop coding schemes.

I analysed the interview transcripts, ethnographic notes, and documents relevant to each chapter on a case by case basis. Although I have a large number of cases (four regions, five parties), for each case, I had between 10 and 15 interviews which averaged around 45 minutes in length. A more open-ended form of analysis was feasible due to this clearly delineated number of documents per chapter.

On first reading, I first considered the data holistically. This included drawing out any novel findings or interesting statements. This process is the 'sense-making' stage of qualitative analysis. This sense-making is important, because "no insights or theories can spring forth from the data without the researcher becoming completely familiar with them" (Elo and Kyngas, 2008: 109). It allowed me to see the data as a whole, and to understand the data as it is contextualized within the experiences of each interview respondent.

I then took a more detailed approach, reading the transcripts numerous times in order to identify cases of transnational information transfer. To identify information transfer, I sought signs of each of the three stages of learning and

highlighted where contextual factors came into play. This allowed me to develop a picture of whether and how party learning occurs. Within-case analysis of party learning was then complemented by a cross-case analysis. Cross case analysis allowed me to capture patterns across all the cases and also enhanced the likelihood of novel findings (Eisenhardt, 1981: 541). Cross-case analysis particularly allows me to reflect on more general findings about patterns of learning and the effect of various contextual factors. These cross-cutting findings are reviewed in the conclusion of this thesis, Chapter Eight.

(6) Social Network Analysis

Finally, interview data is used to generate social network analysis (SNA) data. I used respondents' reflections on their party relationships to visualize ego-centric networks. The ego-centric network or personal network "indicates how an individual is tied to an outside social world" (Wu et al., 2016: 260). Ego-centric networks are biased towards close ties (Marsden, 1990: 439). This may be especially true in the way that I collected data, since individuals were asked in interviews to name those political parties in Europe to which they felt closest. This is an 'unaided recall' method, rather than one which provides a specific list for respondents to reflect on. The choice to ask for an unaided recall of parties reflects the purpose of the question in measuring truly close and salient relationships (Marsden, 1990: 441-2). SNA visualizations of individuals' relationships should be understood as limited. They can only show respondents' self-reported understanding of and attitude towards other political parties.

In each chapter, I provide a visualization of which political parties' interview respondents positively mentioned. In EFA, other regionalist parties are often colloquially referred to by their region (i.e. 'the Basques' instead of Eusko Alkartasuna). In some cases, respondents mentioned relationships with regions rather than parties. This was 'read' as mentions of the corresponding

member party of EFA. Positive mentions were understood as any reference to another party which suggested a positive interaction with or feeling towards the party. The coding of interview transcripts thus excluded mentions of parties which the respondent saw as different or distant.

These visualizations are ultimately descriptive and limited. They only provide information about the relationships of my interview respondents and cannot capture the full network of any party. However, by providing these graphic descriptions of respondents' relationships, I hope to provide the reader with a foundational understanding of the EFA network before analysing the data qualitatively.

2.3 Conclusion

I have chosen to conduct a small-n qualitative comparison of four similar parties within the European Free Alliance. This contextualized, qualitative approach allows for an exploration first (within-case) whether learning occurs between EFA member parties. Then, through cross-case analysis and identification of differing contextual factors, I explore which factors and contexts might make party learning within the TNP more likely. To capture learning, I use interview and observational data, triangulated with documentary analysis. Interviews and observations are also multi-lingual, ensuring the closest relationship to the contexts within which political parties make decisions.

Comparison could have been structured differently, for example comparing two TNPs to one another. However, this would have led to different theoretical outcomes, for example, by exploring party learning from a more transnational level, rather than digging into the process of learning at a domestic party level. For the purposes set out in this thesis, the qualitative, small-n comparison set out in this chapter allow for an initial exploration of the concept of party learning in a TNP. In Chapter 9, I reflect further on methodological difficulties and alternate choices that might be taken in further studies.

Chapter Three: The Role of the European Free Alliance in Member Party Learning

Having reviewed how transnational political parties are theoretically understood, this chapter introduces the European Free Alliance, its organisational structure, and the role and nature of member parties in EFA. The first section describes EFA's component parts (the EP group, the secretariat, EFAy), how they work together, and how they have developed. The second section introduces EFA's member parties, considering how they vary on the contextual factors introduced previously. It also discusses different types of member party interaction under the umbrella of EFA. Finally, the third section touches on the individual members of each EFA member party and discusses the role of individual agents in EFA.

This chapter draws on four participant observations. I observed EFA at two consecutive General Assemblies (2017, 2018) and two different more specific events: one policy oriented (Environmental Sustainability Conference) and one political (Catalan referendum). Individuals quoted or referenced from these observations will be anonymized. This chapter also draws on interviews with senior EFA staff members, in the party's organizational headquarters and in the EP group.

Through these sources, I examine the role of the European Free Alliance in member party interactions and seek to illustrate the dense network of structures and interactions that comprise the European Free Alliance. I review the three different levels of EFA's structure (TNP, member party, individual). First, I provide an overview of EFA's formal structure and the individuals that take institutional roles in organising EFA. Then, I consider EFA's member parties, their diversity, and the formal/informal personal interactions they have with one another. Finally, I briefly discuss the characteristics of the individuals that are most engaged in EFA. By showing the varied levels and types of

interactions in EFA, I provide a base from which we can, in the following chapters, consider whether party-to-party interactions generate learning.

3.1 What is the European Free Alliance?

The European Free Alliance is a transnational political party comprised of 36 full member parties and 8 observer parties[5] from across Europe. As the map in Figure 3.2 shows, parties are distributed across Europe. Appendix Two of this thesis includes a list of EFA member and observer parties, alongside a list of abbreviations for each. EFA member parties vary in size, level of autonomy, party development, and left-right ideology. However, parties unite to promote self-determination, which can take the form of "linguistic or cultural rights, devolution, expanding regional or federal powers, demanding autonomy, achieving independence through a referendum" (EFA Manifesto 2019). The number of EFA member parties has expanded significantly over time, as shown in Table 3.1, although membership has stabilized in recent years.

Table 3.1 Growth in EFA Member Parties Over Time

Year	Number of Member Parties
1981	6
1991	21
2001	22
2011	36
2018	36

Source: Kernalegenn (2013: 4)

At a transnational level, EFA's organisational structure can also disaggregated into multiple different bodies, including:

- EP Group: including MEPs and staff
- Secretariat: central organizing staff

[5] According to the EFA Articles of Association (Article 5), a party must be an observer member for at least a year before being accepted by the General Assembly as a full member. Observer members must meet the criteria of a full member party.

- Bureau: programmatic steering group
- Associations: most prominently EFA Youth (EFAy)
- Political foundation: Centre Maurits Coppetiers (CMC).

To show the overall relationships between these different bodies, EFA has an organigram of its internal relationships (Figure 3.1). This notably leaves member parties out. If one were to insert the member party into this organisational diagram, they would have influence through their votes in General Assemblies as well as through their discussions with the bureau and secretariat. The omission of member parties shows how many dynamics in the transnational political party are more informal than official, requiring a more qualitative and grounded approach. The structure also leaves the EP Group out of the decision-making process. This reflects the division between the transnational political party and EP group after the 2004 revisions to TNP regulations.

Figure 3.1 EFA Structure as defined by the party

Source : http://www.e-f-a.org/about-us/structure/

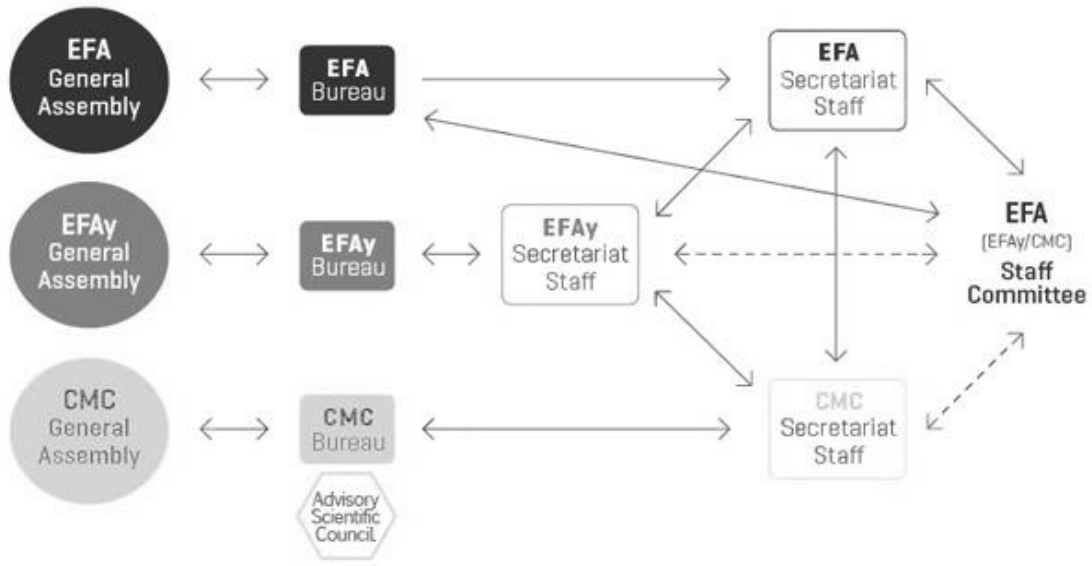


Figure 3.2 Map of European Free Alliance Member Regions

Source: EFA Website http://www.e-f-a.org/whos-who/member-parties/

When considering ‘what’ the European Free Alliance is, it is important to look beyond its organisational structures and to consider how it has been understood as an object in existing scholarly research. However, as reviewed

in Chapter Two, very little has been written on the nature of the transnational political party as a whole. Even fewer studies have focused on the relatively small and marginal European Free Alliance. Literature on TNPs has predominantly taken the Party of European Socialists (PES) as a case. Key research on EFA occurred in the early 2000s, as part of wider research on the 'Europe of the Regions' and nationalist and regionalist positions on European integration.

EFA was seen as one of a wider array of 'territorial lobbies' that conceptualized the 'Europe of the Regions' idea and promoted the Committee of the Regions in 1992 (Lynch and DeWinter, 2008: 583; Keating et al., 2006: 450). Parties' lobbying at the EU level led to studies of a 'regionalist turn' towards the EU. This interest in stateless nationalist and regionalist parties' positions on the European Union was no doubt aided by the high profile turn in the Scottish National Party towards an 'Independence in Europe' platform in the early 1990s. Jolly (2007) argued that the 'Europhile fringe' created by stateless nationalist and regionalist parties was aided by a 'viability logic.' That is: the EU makes independence more viable by encouraging greater economic integration and giving small states an equal footing at negotiations. Along this viability logic, the EU could be seen as an 'external support system to statehood' (Keating, 2009: 208).

However, as soon as the concept of a 'Europhile' turn was introduced, scholars sought to point out the diversity and complexity of nationalist and regionalist parties' responses to the EU (Hepburn, 2008; Elias 2008). Massetti (2009) argued that the Europhilia was in the past. Later, he argued, nationalist and regionalist parties took a turn towards more ambiguous and Eurosceptic policies occurred during (and as a result of) the 'constitutional and neo-liberal' phase of the EU in the early 2000s. He also noted that prior studies may have overstated the pro-European stances of stateless nationalists and regionalists.

Beyond the focus on how nationalist and regionalist parties adjusted their ideologies, there were a small number of studies looking at the organisational effect of Europe on nationalist and regionalist parties. DeWinter and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro sought to understand how Europeanization, through institutions like the European Free Alliance, affected the nationalist and regionalist party family. They noted that EFA was "characterized by main ideological differences and problems of collective action and cooperation. Weak institutionalization is a defining feature of this party family" (DeWinter and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002: 485). They find that this weak institutionalization reduces the effect of EFA's ideological influence. However, they did find signs of organizational change, at least at an elite level, driven by European elections and the new role of MEPs.

Lynch and DeWinter (2008) also argued that the European Union provides political opportunity structures for EFA's member parties. For example, EFA can help parties mobilize in the European Parliament (regardless of whether they have an MEP but especially in the case of an MEP), aligns parties to one another in the Committee of the Regions, and provides support for local development of parties. However, the article centres on the 2004 European Parliament elections, in which EFA lost half of its MEPs. This period led to a loss of organisational strength for EFA not only due to its poor electoral results. EFA and the regionalist Europeanist project also suffered due to the perceived irrelevance of the Committee of the Regions, EFA's failure to draw new members from the Eastern European enlargement countries, and the neglect of minority nationalist voices in the European constitutional process.

As such, by the mid-2000s, both the ideological convergence between regionalism and pro-Europeanism and the political opportunities of the EU seemed to have waned. Scholarly attention to the European Free Alliance and stateless nationalists waned in parallel.

Beyond this ‘Europe of the Regions’ moment, the European Free Alliance has also been included within wider studies of transnational political parties in the EU. However, in this literature, discussions of EFA are usually incorporated into analyses of the Greens-EFA group in the European Parliament. In these cases, the Green Party element of the group is emphasized, given its larger size. In the next section, I review the role and nature of the EP group and argue that it is over-emphasized in existing literature on transnational political parties.

These earlier studies on the European Free Alliance and its member parties provide valuable information on the formation and purpose of EFA, particularly providing background for the role of the TNP in the 1990s and early 2000s. My research departs from this existing literature. First, my research focuses exclusively on the contemporary shape and politics of the European Free Alliance. Its depth comes from the span of regions/parties studied rather than from the span of history it covers. This revisiting of EFA is timely as the party has become more institutionalized and established since the TNP regulations changed in the mid-2000s.

Second, my research does not see the EFA structures as incidental or marginal to a wider research project (i.e. EFA as one part of a study of ideological change in nationalist and regionalist parties). Rather, I focus predominantly on EFA and the transnational interactions between EFA member parties. In order to provide a foundation for this thesis, the rest of this section will break down the different parts of the European Free Alliance to provide a basis for the subsequent analysis.

(1) The EFA EP Group

The 1979 European Parliament elections drove the creation of the European Free Alliance (EFA). The European Parliament incentivizes transnational party coalitions, due to the system of committee and funding allocation. EFA was originally called the Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe – European

Free Alliance (DPPE-EFA). DPPE-EFA's first General Assembly was held in 1981. In its early years, the DPPE-EFA was centered predominantly at the European Parliament. Organizationally, in these years, EFA was comprised largely of the group and its staff. However, from 1995 onwards, DPPE-EFA developed itself as a European political party and grew slowly in members. After the 2004 reforms in TNP regulations, a more structured division developed between the EP Group and EFA as a political party (Kernalegenn, 2013: 4-5).

The European Free Alliance MEPs, too small to create their own autonomous EP Group, have joined other groups. Table 3.2, updated from Lynch and DeWinter (2008: 587), shows the progression of EFA's EP Group membership. EFA has been allied with the Green Group since 1999.

Table 3.2 The European Free Alliance and EP Groups Over Time

European Parliament Session	EP Group	EFA MEPs (Overall Group MEPs)
1979-1984	Technical co-ordination group	2 (12)
1984-1989	Rainbow Group 1	3 (20)
1989-1994	Rainbow Group 2	8 (15)
1994-1999	European Radical Alliance	4 (19)
1999-2004	Greens/EFA	10 (45)
2004-2009	Greens/EFA	5 (42)
2009-2014	Greens/EFA	7 (50)
2014-2019	Greens/EFA	7 (52)

Source: European Parliament website; Lynch and DeWinter (2008: 587)

Currently, only five of EFA's member parties are represented in the EFA EP group. Most EFA member parties do not have an MEP, while the SNP and ERC each have two. Member party the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) has MEPs which sit in a different EP group, the European Conservatives and Reformists

(ECR).[6] Many EFA members do not run in European Parliamentary elections; others struggle to gain votes due to their marginal and regional nature.

European Parliament elections are particularly challenging for regional parties. Twenty two EU states are comprised of only one European Parliament constituency (including the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany). For regional parties, gaining enough votes across the whole country to be elected to the European Parliament is more difficult as their support is concentrated into the regional subset of the population. Furthermore, there are proposals to implement a 5% minimum vote threshold for EP elections. EFA has opposed the implementation of such thresholds and urged member N-VA to block any such initiative in the European Council. Given existing difficulties and the threat of minimum vote thresholds, for regional parties, election to the European Parliament on a regional platform requires either very significant regional support or access to regionalist coalition partners within one state. When parties run on a coalition platform, they may share an MEP seat, as is visible in Table 3.3.

The limited number of parties in the EP group causes a two-level EFA. Parties who have or could have elected Members of the European Parliament tend to discuss the EP manifesto together at General Assemblies. Those that don't run often don't engage in the debates on these issues especially in the preliminary stages.

[6] The N-VA is a party which follows on from the Volksunie (VU), one of EFA's founding parties. In 2014, the N-VA Group in the European Parliament became a member of the ECR in order to better reflect their political priorities in that electoral manifesto. As a result, the EFA Presidency moved from the N-VA's Eric de Voort to Corsican President Francois Alfonsi (Gomez-Reino, 2017: 142).

Table 3.3 Members of the European Parliament in the EFA EP Group

Name	Party	Position in EP Group	Years Served
Josep-Maria Terricabras	ERC	EFA President and first Vice President of the Greens/EFA Group	2014-2019
Jordi Solé*	ERC		2017-2019
Ernest Maragall*	New Catalan Left		2014-2016
Ian Hudghton	SNP	Vice President	1999-2019
Alyn Smith	SNP		2004-2019
Jill Evans	Plaid Cymru	Vice President	1999-2019
Ana Miranda**	Bloque Nacionalista Galego		2018-2019
Josu Juaristi**	EH Bildu		2016-2018
Miroslavs Mitrofanovs***	Latvijas Krievu savienība		2018-2019
Tatjana Ždanoka***	Latvijas Krievu savienība		2004-2018

*Stepped down part way through term due to running on a shared electoral list.

***Ždanoka stepped down to run in the Latvian Parliamentary election

Nonetheless, the EP manifesto is voted on by all parties. Furthermore, once elected, MEPs work with all member parties. As one of the EP Group's advisers explained:

> "For the first election of the European parliament there was [Flemish MEP] Maurits Coppieters. Coppieters went to Corsica and Bastia in '79 and said to the Corsicans, 'I will be your MEP'. It was a shock. He was a Flemish guy saying to a Corsican audience, 'I will be your MEP'. How could you be my MEP? You are not elected by me. And this was one of the founding moments of EFA. Yes, we have MEPs elected from the stateless nations but at the end, he or she should be the MEP of all stateless nationals in EU" (Interview 37).

This representative function is expressed through MEPs' work in the European Parliament and in visits to regions. In the European Parliament, MEPs are often

asked to speak for non-represented EFA parties. For example, at the 2018 EFA General Assembly (GA), the EP Group was asked to make representations to French President Emanuel Macron (who would shortly be visiting the EP) on behalf of EFA's Corsican member parties. Smaller parties from the French state also encouraged the EP Group to include more widespread French minority rights.

As one elected member of the Frisian National Party explained, "The moment that something happens with us that is related to European policy or the European Union, we contact our people in the EP and they will ask questions" (Interview 3). The EP Group sponsors events in Brussels to draw attention to regional issues, such as a conference on "The Catalan Path to Independence" and (post-Brexit) "Plaid Cymru: positive about the EU." The EP Group also sends official delegations abroad. For example, in 2017 the EP Group sent official delegations to Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Wales. They attended events such as the General Assembly of the Parti Québécois, Sinn Fein's Annual Conference and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean. Through their roles as MEPs, the EP Group navigates the network of the regionalists/nationalists.

However, the EFA EP Group must work primarily through the European Parliament. The EP Group has several limitations in their work for EFA. First, the Group only represents a small number of EFA parties. Second, MEPs predominantly do Parliamentary work: serving on committees, liaising with constituents, and pushing their own parties' interests such as Brexit, the Catalan referendum, and fisheries. Third, MEPs must focus on their relationships with their voters and national party. Research has found that, in their voting behaviour, MEPs are much more driven by national party membership than their EP group (Hix, 2002). One member of EFA prominent in European relations in his region explained:

> "[In the EFA EP Group] of course we try to reach common positions, we always try to vote in the same way, but there is always the possibility that one member wants to vote yes and the other one votes no, for legitimate reasons, and then of course what prevails is the individual position" (Interview 25).

Finally, MEPs have significant freedom to develop policies without the constraints of other EFA parties. MEPs run on a manifesto agreed at the EFA General Assembly, but these manifestos are vague. Lynch explained that EFA initially developed, "a very broad common programme which was essentially a statement of principles rather than a political manifesto" (Lynch, 2003: 193). At the 2018 General Assembly, discussions about the lack of political positioning in the EP manifesto continued. Parties running for the EP develop their own domestic manifestos. These align with the EFA manifesto and may draw on it, but variance in each parties' domestic approach encourages a vagueness at the transnational level.

Given the vague EFA policy basis, the EP Group must work to find common positions on votes in the Parliament. They must also agree these positions and often take forward shared policy initiatives with European Green MEPs. As noted previously, EFA coalesces in the European Parliament with the European Green Party. This coalition is made necessary by the regulations on EP Party Groups which require 25 MEPs from 7 different countries. Forming an EP party group is beneficial because of the role of party groups in the EP as 'agenda setters' (Hix et al., 2006: 496). However, the European Greens have their own extra-Parliamentary party structures and act as a separate TNP.

Every EFA MEP has a right to contribute and to develop the EFA/Greens position. An EFA EP Group policy adviser explained:

> "I stimulate a discussion in the group aiming at reaching a compromise in the group to ensure that a certain point, we have a group policy on something. So, if there is an issue which is coming up quite soon, my role is also to, to avoid a difficult situation at the end. We will vote in

> plenary to secure a group position beforehand to be sure that the group is united on this" (Interview 37).

MEPs contribute to EFA transnational networking and are leaders in the network. However, much of their work happens independently of EFA member parties. MEPs are constrained by both their national parties and voters and by the institutional requirements and work of the EP.

There is some coordination between national Parliamentarians from each party and the EP group, but this coordination is 'the weakest point.' The European sphere and policy decisions are not of interest to all national Parliamentarians. For example, the EP Group must develop its policy on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework years before the legislation goes into effect. However, national Parliamentarians "have other priorities, because of course, in politics you want to fix the next problem first…It's difficult to think in the long term" (Interview 37). The distance between national and European party can be partly understood by the idea that EP elections are 'second order,' meaning that, from the voters' perspective there is 'less at stake' (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

Existing literature on TNPs centres heavily on the EP Group but this is a limiting focus. The focus on EP Groups seems to stem from the lack of development and weakness of TNP's extra-parliamentary bodies until very recently (Bardi, 1996: 102). Given the changes to transnational political party regulations in the last 15 years, I argue that the TNP now communicates with and coordinates member parties primarily through EFA's central *organisational* institutions: the secretariat and the bureau. This is particularly important in the European Free Alliance, because very few EFA member parties elect a MEP, and many do not run in EP elections.

(2) The Secretariat

The secretariat in the TNP network has become more important since new TNP regulations. Since the changes in regulations, “all five Europarties now have a permanent salaried staff, although the number employed varies from two for the EFA to 20 for the EPP” (Lightfoot, 2006: 309). EFA has, since Lightfoot’s (2006) analysis, doubled its staff. It now has five permanent staff. It has a legal advisor, and two recently formed roles of the financial officer and communications and community manager. The party also has a rotating internship scheme open to young people from its member parties. EFA’s permanent staff is listed in table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4 Members of the EFA Secretariat (January 2019)

Name	Position
Günther Dauwen	Director
Eva Bidania	Political Adviser
Gio Paolo Baglioni	Legal Adviser
Laura Milena Rahman	Communications and Community Manager
Marivic Claveria	Financial and Administrative Officer

Unlike EP groups, there are no comparative or focused studies of Euro-party secretariats. However, since regulatory changes, “Europarties are becoming more autonomous vis-à-vis their member parties and vis-à-vis their respective groups in the European Parliament” (Johansson, 2009: 174). In contrast to MEPS who are stretched between the ‘two principals’ of the TNP and domestic party (Hix, 2002), members of the TNP secretariat generally tend to hold a more transnational identity and beliefs. This is what Day calls a “tendency to operate on the basis of *instinctual supranationalism*” (2005: 62).

EFA’s secretariat members reflect this ambition. They eschew links to specific EFA member parties. One explained: “Since the beginning, I could work for all the parties of EFA. That was very clear for me. If there was one thing written on my forehead, it's that I hate conflict of interest. Working for one party, or favouring that one party, would go against my work or my professionalism in

general" (Interview 11). Another said: "We succeeded in that because more and more in General Assemblies people come to us and say, "You are EFA, you are the backbone of EFA" (Interview 10). Members of the secretariat are among the most recognizable figures for EFA members. They regularly travel to attend and help organise events in EFA's member regions.

EFA's internal rules note: "The EFA Secretariat shall carry out the decisions of the Federation. It shall be responsible, in particular, for assisting the President, the Secretary-General and the Vice-Presidents, for preparing and organizing meetings and for relations with the member parties, the press and the public." Secretariat staff are the organisational and administrative organ of EFA. Their tasks are myriad: "We have to do a little bit of everything. We have to do accounts, we have to do political speeches, we have to book flights, we have to help organise events...We do everything: bilateral contact with the parties, coordinate events, coordinate meetings" (Interview 11).

The concentration of EFA's organisational work into this small group of individuals, and predominantly into Dauwen and Bidania, has a profound effect on the nature of the EFA network. Given their contact with all member parties, the secretariat can be seen as a bridge across the EFA network. Information is consolidated in the EFA secretariat. One member explained, "We have the whole picture: finances, administration, political situation in the country of our member, events they want to organise, etc. Do they involve us? Do they not involve us?" (Interview 11). This allows for a shorter distance between member parties, in the sense that they are all linked through only a few individuals. However, as one member of the secretariat said, "The handicap is that we are human beings, we are not robots. We only have 24 hours per day like any other person. We have to be very efficient" (Interview 10).

The secretariat is particularly important in the case of EFA, because EFA does not have high level elected officials in EU member states. Parties like the

European People's Party and Party of European Socialists organise ministerial meetings before European Council meetings; this is not possible for EFA members (Johansson, 2009: 163). EFA secretariat staff must stimulate exchange outside of the EU's institutions, promote contacts between member parties, and facilitate the network as a whole. The secretariat crucially provides spaces for information exchange within EFA.

(3) The Bureau

In contrast to the secretariat, whose members act at a truly transnational level, the EFA bureau is comprised of members from EFA member parties. Bureau members are nominated by EFA's member parties and voted on at the General Assembly. There is no set term for bureau membership outlined in EFA's rules of internal order.

The EFA bureau is:

> "The executive body of the EFA. We implement the program from the General Assembly. But we are also very easy to ask questions about memberships, finances, the program...especially the practice side of membership. The daily implementation of the work is done through the [secretariat] office" (Interview 9). They meet six to seven times a year. In these meetings, bureau members discuss issues in EFA, the party's political trajectory, and their work with member parties. The main purpose of the bureau is to "support our member parties in their missions" (Interview 9).

Members of the bureau travel extensively throughout the year to different events. For example, in 2017, members of the bureau attended 10 party congresses, met with individual parties in Brussels or their regions, attended national days, rallies, and organised conferences on issues such as minority media, state building, green nations, and more. These visits were spread across numerous regions from Galicia to Friesland to Transylvania. The bureau also participates in EP Group events, such as their 3-day joint meeting in Wales, or conferences in Brussels (such as the conference on the Future of Catalonia).

Table 3.5 Members of the EFA Bureau (September 2018)

Name	Position	Party
François Alfonsi	President	Partitu di a Nazione Corsa
Jordi Solé	Secretary General	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
Lorena Lopez de Lacalle	Treasurer and Vice-President	Eusko Alkartasuna
Jill Evans MEP	Vice-President	Plaid Cymru
David Grosclaude	Vice-President	Partit Occitan
Andrea Cocco	Vice-President	Partiu Sartu d'Azione
Anke Spoorendonk	Vice-President	Südschleswigschen Wählerverbands
Wouter Patho	Vice-President	Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie
Olrik Bouma	Vice-President	Frisian National Party
Anders Eriksson	Vice-President	Ålands Framtid
Marta Bainka	Vice-President	Ruch Autonomii Slaska

The bureau also helps member parties navigate the European Union. For example, when the FNP wanted to seek help from EFA on regional bus announcements in Frisian, they did so via their bureau member, who arranged for a question to be asked by MEPs. Through their personal networks, bureau members thus link EFA's member parties to the central organisation in Brussels. They can also be seen as central agents of information exchange linking the EFA network. Having a member of the bureau is seen as a way to have easier access to EFA's central organizing institutions. For example, in the 2017 debate about the membership of an Italy-based party of EFA, one delegate, exasperated with the direction of the debate, explained: "It was easier when there was an Italian member of the bureau."

When asked about the most active member parties of EFA, one of EFA's staff explained: "Over a longer period of time, in the most consistent way then I would say that you have to mention the parties in the bureau, the parties who were the founders. Most are very active and important and still have a role in our structure and in our current bureau" (Interview 10). As the following

chapters will show, parties with a bureau member (including the FNP and ERC) see these members as having a high profile regionally. For example, ERC's bureau member Jordi Solé was also the Minister of Europe and is now an MEP. Meanwhile the FNP's bureau members have previously been a provincial council member and head of the FNP's EFA Commission. Their current bureau member, Olrik Bouma, was previously an EFA intern, CMC intern, and EFAy Secretary General. Bouma was described by another member of his party as 'our man in Brussels.' Given his presence in Brussels, one of the FNP's staff members explained, "The lines [of communication] are much shorter" (Interview 6).

Bureau membership entrenches certain individuals in the EFA network. This may give their party more access to information. However, bureau members also interact across the EFA network. They travel across Europe to represent EFA officially to the member parties. With the help of the secretariat and EP Group, the bureau also takes part in organizing events at both regional and European level to amplify the voices of EFA member parties.

(4) EFA Youth

EFA Youth, often shorted to EFAy, is a separate organisation from EFA with its own General Assembly, bureau, and coordinator. Substantively, EFAy and EFA differ in their programmes, leadership, and membership. EFAy has 28 members, whereas EFA has 44 members and observer members. Members of EFA do not have to have youth organisations that are members of the youth party; the reverse may also be true. For example, one EFA staff member explained that the Republic Party in the Faroe Islands are considering, yet not actively seeking membership of EFA. However, "the youth branch of the Republic Party joined EFA youth a couple of years ago and they are pushing the party to join EFA" (Interview 11).

The two organisations do work closely together. EFA funds EFAy and the EFAy Secretary General works in the EFA office. In recent years, EFA and EFAy General Assemblies have been held in parallel to one another. EFAy also presents its year's activities to EFA's GA (Interview 37). EFAy bureau members act in a similar fashion to EFA bureau members, attending member parties' national days, rallies, and conferences. They also attend meetings of other, more generalised youth organisations, such as the European Youth Forum, the International Youth for Peace meeting, and the European Youth Conference.

EFAy has grown alongside EFA. An earlier coordinator of EFAy explained that in the past, "The members of EFA youth were not very responsive. Of course, those organisations are very often very small political parties" (Interview 11). A former president of EFAy explained, "When I became president (in 2011), the youth branch was almost inactive" (Interview 37). EFAy faces more difficulties than the 'mother' party. In EFAy, members tend not to be employed by their political party. As such, "usually you have one or two people involved in the international relationship in EFA youth…it depends a lot on the commitments of those people" (Interview 37).

Table 3.6 Members of the EFA Youth Bureau (2018-2019)

Name	Position	Party
Max Zañartu	President	Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana
Gerard Bona	Secretary General/Coordinator	Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana
Karolina Rzepecka	Treasurer/Vice President	Młodzi Górnoślązacy
Adrián Fuentes Arévalo	Vice President for External Relations	Gazte Abertzaleak
Deian Timms	Vice President for Institutional Affairs	Plaid Cymru Ifanc
Àngels Grimalt i Vives	Vice-president for Gender and LGBT+ Rights	Joves PV – Compromís
Giovanni Masarà	Vice-president for Policy and Training and Communications Officer	Sanca Veneta

Despite earlier difficulties, the youth parties are also ‘more dynamic’ and more likely to engage with one another, perhaps due to young people’s language skills and their ‘youthful political idealism’ (Interview 9). After all, “if you’re a young person active at a European level for a political party that means that you must be really interested in that party, because a normal or average young person isn’t” (Interview 9). The enthusiasm and organisational independence of EFAy may affect transnational party networking in a few ways.

First, it may provide a more radical political and ideological space for discussion. Youth collaborations can be a testing or training space for policies, and they try to affect EFA ‘mother party’ policy making as well. For example, EFAy has organised a number of events on feminist issues and opposing the radical right. In the EFA mother party, “political parties are often very stiff, like an elephant. It goes very slow sometimes because they also depend on the domestic political situation…With the youth, it's not always like that. They have more freedom, they're not as exposed to be elected for example” (Interview 11).

Second, involvement in EFAy can build capacity and skills in member party’s young activists. Among young members of EFA, there are fewer elected or employed members of political parties. EFAy creates a (funded) opportunity to encourage members to be more involved in politics. One party leader explained, “The meetings between youth parties are important for us. It’s a role of formation in our party…It helps newcomers feel more strongly” (Interview 20). This was one reason for holding the General Assemblies simultaneously. One EFA staff member explained: “It's good that the youngsters see the perspective of the adult party...seeing that there's something more…That is why we finance that one youngster per party comes and we pay their travel cost and accommodation” (Interview 10).

Finally, engagement with EFAy can sometimes lead to future engagement with the 'mother party' of EFA. A member of the EFA secretariat explained: "Sometimes a young generation takes over a party and if you are in good contact with your youth branch and they grow towards being the leadership of the new party, that helps" (Interview 10). One example of this would be EFA's political adviser Eva Bidania. Bidania, "joined the [Eusko Alkartasuna] youth branch and I was in the board of the youth branch for many years. As member of the board, I had the opportunity to join EFA General Assemblies." She then went on to hold the position of EFAy secretary general and eventually to be EFA secretariat staff. The youth party thus allows for a development of young regionalists and nationalists within the organisational culture of EFA and provides a sense of continuity within the network.

(5) The Political Foundation: Centre Maurits Coppetiers

The Centre Maurits Coppetiers (CMC) is both the youngest component of EFA and the most distant from political parties. The CMC was founded in 2007 after the TNP reforms encouraged the creation of political foundations. Each political foundation is linked with a specific TNP. The CMC is comprised of 12 full members and 5 associated members. Seven of these members are from Spain and three from France. These member organisations and the CMC form a think tank which centres on the key issues of EFA: cultural diversity, minority rights, decentralization, self-determination, and constitutional reforms (CMC website, ideasforeurope.eu).

The CMC links researchers to EFA. Political foundations have had a formal, funded role in the EU and were envisioned by the European Commission as "'catalysers of new ideas' and a means of strengthening 'informed debate on current and future European issues" (Dakowska, 2009: 202). As Dakowksa (2009) has shown, TNP political foundations create networks of national political foundations, EP groups, TNP secretariats/bureaus, Commission

officials, and other interested actors. To ensure coherence the CMC's work with EFA, Günther Dauwen is both the Secretary General of the CMC and the Director of EFA. He explained: "this is to ensure that we work in a smooth way and that I know first-hand what is cooking in the foundation, what they aim to do, so that the party also knows that."

By creating a space for collating information, the CMC would seem to be a useful place to consider learning. However, the CMC is a recently founded component of EFA. While TNP's political foundations have potential to be impactful, the "potential policy impact of these organisations is difficult to measure since their definitive form and role remains to be clarified" (Dakowska, 2009: 217). CMC development is still in nascent forms and it would be early to draw conclusions. Furthermore, the CMC is not fully integrated into the EFA network. Members of the CMC represent very few member regions of EFA. It is dominated by those based in the French and Spanish states. The CMC's members are foundations and not domestic political parties. The CMC's political foundations are linked to domestic political parties, but the CMC does not have a direct link to all EFA member parties.

I have chosen to focus on EFA member party-to-member party relationships, rather than those mediated through the CMC and political foundations. Diane Stone recognizes that think tanks can network internationally (2000, 55). However, she also concludes that they're more likely to take a passive role in the process. Studying the role of political foundations in party learning would an interesting area for future studies of learning in TNPs.

(6) EFA and Typologies of the TNP

Having reviewed the different parts of EFA, to conclude this section, I return to existing typologies and categorizations of transnational political parties which were considered in Chapter One. A common categorization is Niedermeyer's (1986) three stages: contact, cooperation, and integration. Lightfoot argues

that EFA has already reached the cooperation stage in which parties are "characterised by permanent transnational interaction and therefore requires a permanent organisation" (Lightfoot, 2006: 304). For Niedermeyer and Lightfoot, at integration stage you would expect "regular meetings, common symbols, staff and own resources" (Lightfoot, 2006: 304). For Dietz, "the integration stage is marked by the transmission of party sovereignty to a European party organization" (2000: 202).

In EFA and other TNPs, the full transfer of sovereignty is lacking; EFA has no coercive power over its members. However, EFA's central actors—the secretariat, bureau, and EP Group—do employ their own resources and, in cooperation with member parties, have regular meetings and communication. EFA's development was explicitly addressed by EFA's Director. He explained:

> "From 2004 to 2009, it was sort of each year trying to increase our representation to see that we don't fall short in representation, to ensure that we continue to be recognized and financed. By 2009, we had a sort of stability and we went into more ambitious ideas for enlarging our political respectability…It was no longer about every day survival but about consolidation and looking ahead to the future."

In this consolidation, EFA expanded its ability to communicate with other actors in the European and international sphere. The party received a lot of attention as a result of the 2014 Scottish referendum: "Those weeks in the run up to the 18 September referendum in Scotland and the Catalan consultation, we had a huge exposure…Ever since that moment, our engine is turning in a higher gear and our visibility is higher" (Interview 10). Consolidation also comes in more subtle ways, such as the change in EFA's 'corporate image' which "help[ed] on the visibility and on the perception of us as a more serious and structured political party" (Interview 11).

EFA's organisational bodies provide spaces for interaction and information exchange between EFA member parties. This may be through the relationship between individuals in the bureau, the connective work of the secretariat, or

events organised in the European Parliament. It is difficult to identify the precise role of EFA staff and leaders, because their work is both so varied and often informal. However, the transnational political party, through its organisational work and web of connections, creates the structural opportunities for parties to interact, and thus potentially learn.

3.2 Member Parties in EFA

Although EFA is the party of minorities and stateless nationalist and regionalist parties, not all parties in this 'party family' are members of EFA. The 'party family' of minority nationalist parties has long been disjointed, along ideological and strategic lines. As such, some prominent parties in the party family—the Lega in Italy, the Catalan PDeCAT, and Basque PNV—are not members of the European Free Alliance. Gómez-Reino argues that "minority nationalist parties maintained their initial fragmentation among political groups over the past three decades" (2017: 119).

Despite these divisions, EFA's approach to membership is characterized by its expansionist, open nature. This open nature includes incorporating and interacting with parties that are not in the Greens/EFA EP Group. For example, the N-VA remains a member of EFA while sitting in a different EP Group. EFA also has relationships with non-EFA parties when they are in government or coalitions with EFA member parties. For example, the EFA offices in Brussels have been used to host meetings for Catalan President Carles Puigdemont, whose party is not in EFA but is allied with EFA member party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC).

However, in this section, I explore the member parties and their role in the European Free Alliance. In the first section, I introduce the member parties of the European Free Alliance by showing their variation along some contextual factors: electoral strength, governing responsibility, and ideology. By reviewing these variations, I highlight the various sub-groupings which may form in the

broader EFA network and which may hinder/facilitation learning. In the second section, I review some possible modes of interaction between member parties in EFA which are facilitated by membership of the TNP.

(1) Introducing the Member Parties in EFA

To be a full member of EFA, a party must contribute financially. EFA must raise 15% of its own resources in order to access the full grant of funding from the European Union. In EFA, the level of a party's contribution is proportionate to the size and success of the party. It is based on the number of representatives that a party has at local, regional, state, and European level with each level of government requiring a higher level of contribution. If a party is in government, they must pay a supplementary contribution. The maximum annual subscription is ten thousand Euros (Articles of Association, Article 7). The need to commit resources to EFA means that parties must actively consider membership and may seek to more actively engage as a result.

Furthermore, membership is not guaranteed for any party who seeks to join EFA. Rather, there is a set process of application. Before the professionalization of EFA, "there were no dossiers, no records, no minimum request of documents on what a party needed to introduce in order to evaluate whether they are eligible to become a member of EFA" (Interview 10). Now, parties must provide internal statutes, political programmes, publications, electoral results, and a list of elected members. This allows EFA to make a more informed decision on membership and is illustrative of the professionalization and institutionalization of the TNP.

While parties are vetted before they become members, EFA is open to a wide range of members. Variation across the network may encourage learning by providing new ideas. Alternately, it may hinder learning by creating barriers in communication between member parties. The tension between consensus and diversity is often explored in organizational learning studies. Managers of

organisations “must actively encourage the development of different and conflicting views of what is thought to be true, while striving for a shared framing of the issues that is broad enough to encompass those differences” (Fiol, 1994: 403). Diversity of experiences in an organisation like EFA provides fodder for information exchange. Consensus provides a foundation for shared interpretations.

The following sections provides an overview of how EFA parties vary on a number of factors including their electoral strength and governing responsibility, ideologies, and culturally. This brief picture of EFA member party variation provides a foundation for the upcoming chapters, which focus on individual parties. It particularly introduces some fundamental lines of separation within the EFA network, which might affect the ability of parties to interact.

Electoral Strength and Governing Responsibility

As previously noted, EFA member parties tend not to have significant representations at the state level. Their primary arena of electoral competition is at the regional level. However, even at the regional level, parties’ success levels vary significantly. Variation of electoral success and governing responsibility are also indicators of many other types of difference between EFA member parties include variance in party membership, funding, and levels of regional empowerment.

In Table 3.7, below, I list the parties that run in distinctive regional elections, their regional vote share in the most recent election, and their level of governing responsibility. Their level of electoral support ranges from just over 1% to almost 50% depending on the region. Furthermore, some parties have sole governing responsibility, some govern in coalitions, some sit in oppositions, and further parties do not have any seats. The table does not include all EFA member parties.

Numerous EFA parties do not have regional institutions that correspond with their territorial demands. For example, for Unser Land in Alsace the consolidation of French regions makes it significantly harder to seek representation as a small, regionalist party. For the Yorkshire Party, there is no singular 'regional' body to compete in, although the party does compete on national and local levels. Other parties do not run in elections due to a lack of resources or electoral rules (such as thresholds) which disadvantage regionalist parties. For example, Rainbow, which represents the Macedonian population in Northern Greece, has previously struggled to fund campaigns and has made allegations of media bias and electoral corruption.

In addition to party-level differences in success and responsibility, EFA member parties are also divided by the level of power devolved to each of their regions. Even regions with devolved legislatures or councils vary in the level of decision making and funding endowed to those devolved bodies. Hooghe et al. (2010) sought to measure the authority of intermediate or regional governments in 42 democracies or quasi-democracies on an annual basis over the period 1950–2006. They showed that regional authority varies on a number of dimensions: first, between self and shared rule. At regional level, regional bodies also vary in their levels of institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy, and representation. Due to this variation, it is important to contextualize parties in their regional institutions.

In Chapter One, I posited that a party's electoral success affects its ability and willingness to engage with the EFA Network. Less successful parties may also struggle to maintain a presence at the European level. For example, in 2018, the German Frisian party, Die Friesen, left EFA. They argued that this was because they did not receive enough support in a European court case, but one EFA staff member suggested to me that Die Friesen had been struggling to maintain EFA connections and may have struggled to pay their contribution.

As a former staff member of EFA said, “Smaller parties are less active because they have difficulties getting traction in their own region and so also difficulties getting traction at the European level. Maybe they have fewer funds, fewer people—there can be different reasons for it” (Interview 9).

Nonetheless, many of EFA’s smaller parties are active, for example sending extra members to the EFA General Assembly or hosting events in their region. Another member of staff for EFA explained, “You have to strike a balance between having strong parties able to be visible (the SNP are the biggest) and at the same time you should not let some small areas, parties, regions down. For example, Galicia is small territory, but the BNG are a really active member there in Galicia” (Interview 37). Small and large parties, as this respondent suggests, have different motives and priorities at the European level. As such, this may cause variation and differentiation between parties in EFA. However, as I will show in the following empirical chapters, differences in electoral success and governing responsibility also incentivize parties to seek out contacts and information from one another.

Table 3.7 Electoral Results and Governing Responsibility of EFA Member Parties

Party Name	Vote Share in Most Recent Regional Election	Governing Responsibility (Regional)
Ålands Framtid	7.4% (2015)	Opposition
Autonomie, Liberté, Participation, Écologie*	9% (2018)	In Coalition Government
Bayernpartei	1.7% (2018)	No seats
Bloc Nacionalista Valencia	18.5% (2015)*	In Coalition Government
Bloque Nacionalista Gallego	8.3% (2015)	Opposition
Eusko Alkartasuna	21.1% (2016)*	Opposition
Esquerra Republicana de Cataunya	21.4% (2017)	In Coalition Government
Fryske Nasjonale Partij	8.4% (2015)	In Coalition Government
Inseme per a Corsica	45.36% (2017)	In Government
Mebyon Kernow	4.0% (2017)	Opposition
Moravané	1.75% (2012)	Opposition
Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	24.8% (2018)	In Coalition Government
Plaid Cymru	20.5% (2016)	Opposition
Partito Sardo d'Azione*	4.67% (2014)	Opposition
Federació PSM-Entesa Nacionlista	15.32% (2015)*	In Coalition Government
Ruch Autonomii Śląska	7.2% (2014)	In Coalition Government
Slovenska Skupnost	1.4% (2013)	Opposition
Scottish National Party	46.5% (2016)	In Government
Südschleswigschen Wählerverbands	4.6% (2017)	Opposition
Schleswig Partei	0.8% (2017)	No seats
Süd-Tiroler Freiheit	6.0% (2018)	Opposition
Union Démocratique Bretonne	6.7% (2015)*	No seats

*parties ran as part of a wider coalition platform

Ideology and Policy Preferences

While self-determination and defence of the sub-state region is the founding commonality of EFA, member parties still vary in their autonomy claims. Some parties are seeking recognition for their language or culture while others make secessionist claims. On the autonomy 'axis' of EFA member party positioning, there tends to be a progression towards *further* autonomy. One EFA staff member explained, "In the self-determination pillar most of the movement goes towards independence. There is not a case of independence where after many years they go towards independence but then they put it in the past" (Interview 10). One member of the EFA bureau explained: "For some, applying the right to self-determination means becoming an independent state but for others that might mean to have autonomy or to have cultural recognition and so on…we try to have a common discourse on basic European matters, but it's not easy sometimes" (Interview 25).

As this respondent suggests, while autonomy is an agreed point of view, discourse on 'basic European matters' can be more difficult. DeWinter and Cachafeiro argue that it is 'ideological distance' which is the crucial disruptor of cohesion in EFA (2002: 49). I use classifications from Massetti and Schakel's 2015 article to show the variance in left/right positioning among EFA member parties. Their article does not include all EFA member parties, so this selection of EFA member parties can only be indicative rather than comprehensive. Their coding classifies parties along a scale from most left (1) to most right (6). This can be seen as a three-class categorization (clearly left (1–2), centrist (3–4), clearly right (5–6)) (Massetti and Schakel, 2015: 877).

Although EFA has members from across the political spectrum, parties tend to skew towards the left and centre-left. There is a perception by some members that there is bias towards the left. As one participant at the General Assembly said: "I believe EFA is blind with its left eye."

Table 3.8 EFA Member Parties' left-right ranking

Party	lr position (in regional elections)	Left/right/centrist
Bloc Nacionalista Galego	1.63	Left
Chunta Aragonesista	2	Left
Eusko Alkartasuna	2	Left
Union Democratique Bretonne	2	Left
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	2.56	Left
Plaid Cymru	2.67	Left
Scottish National Party	2.67	Left
Partito Sardo d'Azione	2.88	Left
Frisian National Party	3.3	Centrist
Süd-Tiroler Freiheit	4	Right
Bayernpartei	5	Right
Nieuwe Vlaamse Alliantie	5	Right

Source: Massetti and Schakel (2015: 875-876)

General Assemblies showed that diversity can hinder communication about policy and politics. The diverse priorities and policies of EFA member parties sometimes meant that conclusions reached at the GA were vague or incomplete. There were clear lines of ideological division, particularly on issues such as immigration. However, as each of the next chapters will show, parties tend to form smaller networks within which they interact mostly with ideologically similar parties.

Ideologically, EFA polices two 'red lines', which exclude parties which are (1) involved in violent conflict or (2) far right and anti-immigrant. As one EFA staff member said, "Anything that has to do with xenophobia, populism, racism, Islamophobia or whatever kind of exclusion and violence, we do not tolerate that" (Interview 10). EFA maintains its boundaries through suspension and expulsion, for example the decision to suspend the Lega Nord in 1994 (which led to the party leaving EFA).

Western and Eastern European Members

The most prominent membership change was caused by the incorporation of Eastern European countries into the EU. The entry of Eastern European countries throughout the early 2000s led to an expansion of European political parties. Lightfoot and Holmes's (2011) study of the Party of European Socialists and the Central and Eastern European accession countries showed that the engagement between the TNP and enlargement parties was largely superficial. They argued that TNPs would need to be more "prepared to countenance disruption of its existing structures and it will also have to be prepared to disturb the interests and preferences of its existing members" (Lightfoot and Holmes, 2011: 55).

The European Free Alliance has nine full and observer members from the new EU member states. The expansion was an explicit goal of the EFA central office after "the period of political consolidation from 2004 to 2009" (Interview 10). EFA and EFAy have Eastern European members. However, the level of engagement between EFA and these Eastern European parties is much lower than with Western European members. The issue was raised at one General Assembly and one bureau member explained: "It's difficult because we are mostly based in Western Europe. But we have to make an effort." They urged parties from new member states to contact the EFA bureau, as the bureau is "already understaffed" and may not always be able to proactively reach out to member parties.

One interview respondent explained, "Ideologically it's difficult to have the same ideas in the West and in the East" (Interview 21). Lynch and DeWinter note that the difficulties for EFA in attracting new accession country parties is also due to the relative centralization of these states which disempowers regional political actors; "this situation is very much 'problems as usual'" (2008: 588). The following empirical chapters will show that few parties identify new accession parties as their close partners. In some cases, respondents explicitly

explain their feeling of alienation from Eastern European parties, who are seen as politically and culturally different.

The Role of Language

While there are a number of ways for member parties to interact with one another there are also barriers to engaging with other parties in EFA. One major barrier is the issue of language. During my observations at EFA events, there were clear linguistic divisions in informal settings. While EFA provides many interpreters during formal debates, in informal gatherings, some members split into linguistic groupings.

For example, there is a clear German speaking group. One respondent noted growing Germanophone links, “including Sud Tiroler Freiheits who are in the Italian state but are very much linked to Bayern Partei and other Germanophone parties. They feel themselves more in line with the Northern approach than the Southern approach” (Interview 11). A member of the UDB explained that links with other parties in the French state were easier because: “We all face the French state, so we support each other, and then we speak French so it's easy" (Interview 20). As these respondents show a shared language and culture encourages links between specific parties. On the other hand, lack of linguistic ability might make it difficult for individuals or parties to engage across the breadth of EFA.

Language learning and multilingualism is a closely held value of many EFA parties, considering their political work to support minority languages. One multilingual respondent explained:

> “Almost all the parties speak English, so it is the language which is most spoken between us…I studied Welsh at university...when we go to Wales and I speak Welsh then everything after that is easier. It gives you access, then it's a pleasure to speak Welsh” (Interview 19).

Members of EFA with fewer English skills are less likely to acquire all information shared at EFA events. They are particularly likely to miss out on

relationships built in more informal networking occasions. They are also less likely to speak and share their own information due to a lack of confidence in transnational communication. Linguistic ability may in some cases hinder communication, but linguistic similarities between parties can also shape which parties engage with one another.

The diversity within the European Free Alliance membership ideologically, geographically and strategically may lead to barriers to exchange in the EFA network. As the party has professionalized, its membership has become more closely vetted and has consolidated its policy stances. Despite this consolidation, my observations at EFA events showed that parties are still likely to engage in smaller sub-networks built on a sense of ideological, linguistic, or geographical commonality. These commonalities allow for the exchange of information which is seen as comparable and which can be interpreted into each member parties' domestic context. The following empirical chapters each include a section on the party's transnational relationships to delineate the scope of interactions that party has in EFA.

(2) Member Party Interactions

Although the first section of this chapter focused on the supranational bodies of EFA, member parties' interactions with one another are fundamental to creating and sustaining EFA. In a commemoration of EFA's 30 year anniversary, EFA's president at the time explained:

> "EFA's activity and political involvement did not start in Parliament. One of EFA's driving principles is self-determination. We promote the emergence of truly constructive interactions between Europe's nations, peoples, communities and citizens, by claiming collective rights, more autonomy and very often full independence."

These interactions between Europe's peoples rather than states are a political ambition of EFA, but the nation to nation ethos of Europe is also enacted within EFA. Events and other types of communication often happen horizontally

between member parties rather than in a top-down nature within EFA. Three main types of interaction occur between member parties of EFA: bilateral, multilateral and virtual.

Bilateral Interactions

EFA's Director noted: "we always try to stimulate bilateral contacts. With the staff that we have here, we can never manage an ever-growing number of member parties" (Interview 10). Bilateral links can take the form of meetings between elected officials, interactions between parties' staff members, organisation of joint events, shared policy projects, and more.

A typical case of a strong bilateral relationship would be the relationship between Plaid Cymru and the Union Démocratique Bretonne. Members of the UDB reported attending events and interacting with Plaid colleagues. Some of these events include the European Free Alliance General Assemblies, or Plaid annual conferences where 'sister parties' are invited to participate. On a trip to Cardiff, UDB members met with the leader of Plaid Cymru Ifanc (Youth) and with Plaid Cymru Assembly members. The UDB also sought to bring Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Wood to Brittany to give a lecture.

The Plaid-UDB links were established within the auspices of the European Free Alliance. However, it is often hard to disentangle the role of the TNP in encouraging further bilateral relations. Sometimes, as in the case of EFA GAs, the TNP directly fosters links. EFA staff may also be involved in encouraging bilateral relationships through personal contacts, which are not easily traceable. In other cases, the UDB and Plaid's joint membership of EFA simply provides structural encouragement for meetings. Their interactions at a multilateral level over a long period of time allowed the relationship to become regularized. The personal links that stem from this regularity then engender further meetings that grow party links beyond EFA's immediate multilateral spaces for interaction.

Multilateral Interactions

Multilateral interactions are much more common than bilateral relationships. Parties may see more value in attending a larger event as it provides more scope for both networking and projecting their party's message. Furthermore, EFA member parties have funded access to multilateral meetings organised by EFA. Fewer member parties will have the strong relationships necessary to initiate and fund regular bilateral contact.

The most important event for EFA collaboration is the annual General Assembly (GA). For each GA, EFA funds one representative from each party to attend. EFAy and the CMC each fund one delegate from each youth party and from each CMC member. These delegates have rights to vote on motions, the EP manifesto, party membership votes, and bureau members. Member parties can also fund additional delegates to participate in networking, fringe events, and debates (without voting). The General Assembly is one of the largest expenses incurred by EFA in its work, costing €94,000 in 2017 and €138,000 in 2016 (Ernst & Young Audit, 2018). The event is held each year in one of the member parties' regions.

The General Assembly also includes numerous spaces for informal relationships and conversations, such as joint lunches, dinners and visits around the local area. As one of EFA's staff explained, "one of the things is to offer the possibility of synergy, contact, networking, everybody being there, talking...where sometimes the motions and declarations are just the alibi for some to talk in the corridors on other topics" (Interview 10). Individuals often return to the GA many years in a row, leading to a sense of deeper relationships between participants. Conversations 'in the corridors' often include knowledge sharing on the political situation in each region on shared issues as well as discussions about controversial GA motions or business.

The GA also allows for the development of cooperative projects. For example, the Sustainable Energy project supported by the Frisian National Party (FNP) was launched and regularly re-evaluated at consecutive General Assemblies. The party sought support, input, and funding from other EFA member parties. The multilateral nature of the event allows the FNP, which has relatively little governing power, to have a dedicated meeting with political activists and politicians from across Europe. For example, in 2017, the FNP's meeting included a Corsican elected member with a portfolio for energy. While these more politicians might not travel to Friesland, the GA provides access. In this sense, the GA provides a level of equal opportunity access which is not possible in the bilateral interactions.

Beyond the General Election, EFA sponsors many other multilateral events. These events might be centered on a particular policy initiative. For example, EFA has been involved in numerous events over the last two years including those focused on environmental sustainability, self-determination, refugees, minority media, civil rights, and more. They might also be centered on a particular political event, with the most prominent recent examples being the organised EFA delegations at the Scottish and Catalan referendums.

In 2017, EFA spent €142,000 on conferences, and €24,000 on 'other meetings.' EFAy, equally, spends most of its budget on its one staff member (a full-time coordinator based in Brussels) and on organising events. Coordination of party interactions by Brussels-based staff is a significant part of EFA's work. This funding and organisational support from EFA bodies is essential to bring members of EFA together. One active member of explained, "For example, it's EFA that organised [the event], who financed and made possible this training in Glasgow. It's thanks to them who bring together all the parties, a little bit on the same line…it is also thanks to EFA that we manage to meet all together and to have an exchange" (Interview 19).

Finally, within some states, EFA parties have developed multilateral institutions to communicate. The most notable of these is the French organisation *Regions et Peuples Solidaires*, which brings together regionalists from across France. There are also looser electoral coalitions (in Spain and the Netherlands), which include but are not exclusively comprised of EFA members. Regions et Peuples Solidaires "is a very well-structured one. They have statutes, it's not just a gathering of friends. Every year they have a General Assembly, a summer university to talk about the hot topics of the year or of the months to come in the hexagon" (Interview 11). They come together to consider how they will advise their voters to vote in the French Presidential elections or how they can collectively pressure the French Government (Interview 10).

While this cooperation has a significant effect in the French state, other states' EFA member parties are less well organised. For example, Italy-based EFA parties tend to have a less harmonious relationship, because "you have both the left/right and independentism conflict there. In Italy you also have the Lega Nord and the racist issue and the xenophobic issue" (Interview 10).

Given the heterogeneity of EFA and the complexities of diversity on autonomy and ideological stances, the organisational bodies of the European Free Alliance hold a key role in bringing together parties. Their encouragement of bilateral interactions and organisational support for multilateral events regularizes exchange between regionalists and nationalists in Europe.

Virtual Interactions

Finally, EFA member parties also interact virtually. This is a necessity, given the geographical spread of the parties and the considerable cost of interacting physically. The most commonly used means of virtual interactions between EFA members are e-mail, Facebook, and WhatsApp. These allow for relationships to be maintained over time. As one locally elected member and active participant in EFA explained, "How do we get support? That also

happens through social media, Facebook and Twitter. EFA sends press releases, organises the General Assembly, distributes newsletters. It is a constant information stream" (Interview 4).

One example of this virtual information sharing could be found during the Catalan referendum. During EFA's observation mission at the referendum, multiple WhatsApp groups were created by EFA staff and attendees. These message exchanges coordinated observers' movements across Barcelona and spread information on the day and afterwards (where police and protests where, which polling places were open, etc). The groups continued to be used after the referendum to share information about Catalan political developments. Attendance at an EFA event can thus engender further interactions through social media. Information exchange is furthered by the ability to keep in contact from a distance.

Parties may interact in less personal ways, such as by following prominent party members on Twitter. This would provide opportunities for information acquisition about EFA partners. This thesis takes an agential approach and focuses on prominent individuals, rather mass interactions. In the future, data mining using Twitter could show wider virtual linkages within the EFA network. Twitter network analysis allows a researcher to consider 'who's following who.' It has been used to study the diffusion of information after specific events, the measurement of individuals' influence, and political communication (Grandjean, 2016). As such, it would be an ideal further tool to use to consider the spread of information within the nationalist and regionalist network when a researcher is interested in a more specific time period or smaller number of parties and individuals. However, this is not in the scope of this thesis.

3.3 Individual Party Members in the EFA Context

Up until this point, I have focused on EFA and its member political parties as collective entities. In this section I address the individual and their agency within EFA structures. In this thesis, I defined EFA's entrepreneurs as individual members of EFA member parties who take an active role in the European Free Alliance. I introduced the concept of 'key entrepreneurs' as a possible contextual factor to affect learning and posited that the work of an active individual could facilitate interaction. On the other hand, concentrating transnational relationships in too few individuals may hinder the spread of information through the EFA member party collectively.

Individual entrepreneurs in EFA may be empowered by the structures of the TNP through membership of the bureau or employment in one of EFA's bodies (secretariat, EP Group). They may also be empowered through positions in their parties, for example by having a position on internal decision making bodies or through an international relations role in regional government. Individuals with a lot of experience and relationships in EFA can connect parties to one another and provide a 'birds-eye' view on policy issues, joint projects, and strategic plans.

Existing literature on TNPs emphasizes the importance of individuals. Van Hecke argues: "Transnational party federations are much more elite-driven than are national political parties. It is the leadership that runs the party, and there is little participation from partisans" (2010: 398). Elites are so crucial, because there are no direct voters for European political parties. Voters select EFA member parties on their EP ballot rather than EFA. As such, there are no true 'partisans' of European political parties, although there is debate (within EFA and within the EU generally) on Europe-wide lists.

Although the Party of European Socialists has introduced individual members or 'activists,' it is the only TNP to have a developed membership programme of this kind (Hertner, 2011: 339-340). EFA introduced a 'Friends of EFA'

programme in late 2018. However, precisely in reaction to concerns about ‘diluting’ the power of the parties, the topic is contentious among members. At the time of this research, elite party members remained the most prominent actors in EFA.

Elite entrepreneurs are *particularly* important for EFA. Other TNPs may have numerous member parties with resources to employ or specify a member of their party to deal with the European Union. They may have members of the government who already interact in Council of the European Union meetings. This is not the case for EFA. EFA’s activist are more likely to be internally motivated (not encouraged by an elected position or employed) to engage at a transnational level. This is why I call them entrepreneurs. Policy entrepreneurs, as characterized by Kingdon (1984), are defined by: “their willingness to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in the hope of a future return” (122).

I argue that regionalists are more likely to take on an entrepreneurial role in Europe due to their relationship with identity. As regionalists, they are more able to see the benefits of transnational networking and to engage in discussions about identity. This point, on identity, draws on Marks’ (1999) discussion of the category of ‘multiple identity,’ as opposed to exclusive identities or unattached identity. Marks’s work sought to unpack the concept of identity in Europe to consider its multi-level implications and the intersection with measures of identity ‘intensity.’ This is reinforced by Cram’s 2009 work studying the way that the European Union encourages and is embraced by many different nationalisms, rather than one singular nation. The EU facilitates “diverse understandings of collective identities” (Cram, 2009: 125).

Active members of the European Free Alliance have also often worked or studied in different European countries. This may serve as both an impetus for their transnational regionalist activism and a skill building experience. For

example, one Italian EFA member party has four members of its international affairs team living in London. Another respondent explained that there was a link between his previous career and his interest in EFA, “because I also worked a lot in foreign countries. Then you also have an open attitude to Europe. I think we were also a generation of people who benefited from the open borders in Europe, free movement of people and services” (Interview 6).

Other respondents noted that their time abroad brought out their political affinity for decentralization and Europe. For example, one UDB member explained that when they returned from their time in Belgium, “all these strangenesses of French nationalism really jumped in my face. I found it completely abnormal the functioning of this country” (Interview 12). Another transnationally active respondent explained his experiences abroad and noted: “when you get a taste of Europe, you want to defend it” (Interview 35).

Conversely, party members that had not had very much experience travelling abroad tended to be more distant from EFA and other member parties. For example, one Breton respondent noted: “I haven’t travelled very much. That’s one of the particularities of my story… I am going to leave those people who have travelled more to give their thoughts” (Interview 17). Non-transnationally active members’ experiences are often more difficult to capture as they are not likely to notice or express the absence of transnational relationships in their activism. However, my selection of interview respondents aims precisely to get a good cross section of active party members: local government representatives, youth party members, party staff members, and state/regional elected members. As such, the network diagrams for each chapter will show that some individuals are less connected transnationally than others. This highlights the diversity of experiences, skills, and knowledge that party members have about EFA and other EFA parties.

3.4 Conclusion

I have posited that interactions between member parties in EFA engender learning. Although events are often organised by or under the auspices of EFA as an organisation, member parties' interactions may not always be organised by EFA centrally. Furthermore, the impact of a transnational political party on its members is often difficult to trace. Engagement between members of EFA is often informal, private, and voluntary. Some events have concluding reports, but outcomes of engagement are often undocumented. Respondents often explained that reports were made directly to the various decision making bodies of their party.

As such, it is difficult to ascertain the precise effect that EFA has in creating a forum for interactions between its member parties. However, this chapter has shown that there are complex but structured networks of relationships within EFA. Different roles are held in this network by EFA's transnational actors, regional member parties, and active entrepreneurs. Active individuals and EFA's central bodies often organise formal structural opportunities for member party interactions. One result of these interactions may be informal, private relationships between Europe's regionalist and nationalist parties. Whether formal or informal, I find in the following four chapters that interactions within the EFA structure engender policy and strategy learning in some cases; meanwhile other parties face barriers to interaction and learning from other European Free Alliance parties. EFA member parties experience EFA as an organisation differently, depending on their regional and internal dynamics. An analysis of different parties' experiences of EFA membership and the process of learning will follow in this thesis's empirical chapters (4-7).

Chapter Four: The Frisian National Party

In 1981, the Frisian National Party (FNP) was one of the founding members of the European Free Alliance and it remains one of the most engaged members of EFA today. Although it is small in international terms, the FNP is the most prominent regionalist party in the Netherlands. It is a regionalist party seeking more autonomy for the province of Friesland, in the northeast of the Netherlands. The party was founded in 1962 and has since based its policies on seeking a 'more Frisian Friesland.' The party emphasizes preserving the Frisian landscape, language and culture. It has seven core values: democracy, federalism, internationalism, language and culture, entrepreneurship, solidarity and sustainability. However, the party is also undergoing internal debate to more specifically determine its policies and electoral strategy; these debates fuel information seeking.

The FNP and its elite members learn from EFA partners. This learning is driven by the party's drive to develop policies and achieve more electoral success. The party's structures put EFA at the centre of international policy and the FNP's EFA entrepreneurs have established structural roles in both the FNP and EFA. This chapter shows how the FNP has acquired, interpreted and implemented new information about sustainable policies in regions, particularly through their joint project and conference with the European Free Alliance. It also highlights the case of electoral strategy in the FNP. Although the party has not collectively learned on this issue, individual members have shown information acquisition and interpretation from more successful EFA partners (particularly the SNP). Finally, two cases in which learning does not occur (minority language policy, refugee policy) are explored to consider the factors that hinder information acquisition.

To explore the consequences of FNP interactions in EFA, I first give an overview of the party. In this overview, I describe the party's position on each

of the contextual factors addressed in the theoretical framework. In section two, I unpack the FNP's transnational interactions with a focus on with which parties and types of interactions it engages in. Section three explores the consequences (or lack thereof) of transnational interactions. It considers whether the FNP displays signs of the process of learning (information acquisition, interpretation, implementation) and behavioural learning. I also examine why learning does not occur. Policy and strategy areas that will be analysed in the case of the FNP are sustainable energy, electoral strategies, language protection and refugee resettlement. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter reflects on the proposed party learning framework in light of the transnational experiences of the FNP.

4.1 Introducing the Frisian National Party

The Frisian National Party (FNP) is based in Friesland, in the North East of the Netherlands. The region is dominated by rural communities, with 50% of people living in towns of less than 5000 people (Penrose, 1990: 430). The region also has a number of islands (the Waddeneilanden) which spread out in an archipelago to the northwest of mainland Friesland. The region's capital is Leeuwarden, where the Provincial Council sits.

Figure 4.1 Map of Friesland in the Netherlands

Source: Wikimedia Commons

In their 2015 categorization of regionalist parties, Massetti and Schakel ranked the FNP on a scale from 1 to 6 (with 1 as radical left, 6 as radical right). The party is coded as centrist with a position of 3.30. In the party's 2019 provincial election manifesto, they called for greater Frisian control over hospitals, housing, schools, and broadcasting. The party called for a referendum to ask the people of Friesland whether the provincial government should have more power over care, housing, and hospitals.

However, the FNP has only recently begun to develop a wider range of policies beyond autonomism. This expansion of policies (on social welfare, education, energy) was driven by a consideration that the FNP would benefit from "showing its colours" more by taking positions on controversial issues in Dutch state-wide politics, like the War in Afghanistan and the referendum on the EU-Ukraine deal. The FNP has been a member of the provincial government since 2011. In the 2011 provincial elections, the party won 9.15% of the vote and in 2015, they won 9.8%. It has four members of the provincial council, and one 'deputised' member in the provincial government who focuses particularly on issues of the Frisian landscape and environment. With one of five Provincial Executive seats, the FNP is a minority coalition partner.

Organisationally, the party is small and grassroots, with approximately 1500 members (as reported by party elites to the author in 2016) (Van der Zwet, 2016: 1244). The party relies heavily on volunteers. The party has an older membership and its youth wing is less active than in other parties. It is disaggregated into different local branches and a few policy commissions. Beyond these organisational commissions, the FNP's policy decision making is very decentralized. Each local FNP branch and city councillors may have a different position on an issue (as long as they fit within the parties' general principles). The FNP's Provincial Council leader is Corlienke de Jong and its member of the Provincial Executive is Johannes Kramer.

Although the party has no Members of the European Parliament, FNP members emphasize their role as a founding member of EFA and this central position continues with an FNP member holding a position on the bureau of EFA. This member used to be provincial council member Sybren Posthumus but has since transitioned to Olrik Bouma, who was described by another interview respondent as ‘our man in Brussels.’ Bouma is now an EFA Bureau member but also formerly held positions as EFA intern, Centre Maurits Coppetiers intern, and former EFA youth Secretary General. The FNP has a foundational and institutional role in the EFA network, as well as active individuals who are more active than other party members. This entrepreneurial role is supported by the party’s EFA Commission, which specifically manages European cooperation in the party.

4.2 Contextual Factors and the Frisian National Party

To describe the Frisian National Party, I consider the party’s position along the five contextual factors. These factors are electoral strength, governing responsibility, party centralization, transnational entrepreneurs, and issue contestation. In the Frisian case, the most important factors that affect its relationship with the European Free Alliance are the party’s lack of electoral success and its embedded transnational entrepreneurs. The party’s ability to learn is reduced by its internal decentralization but increased by its high level of issue contestation.

(1) Electoral Strength and Governing Responsibility

Compared to other parties in EFA, the FNP has relatively low electoral success, but it has recently gained more governing responsibility at the provincial level. Since its entry into Frisian politics, the party has consistently won at least one seat in Friesland’s Provincial State Council. The table below shows the party’s performance in Provincial State elections from 1966 until 2015. The party runs

only in the provincial and municipal elections in Friesland, unlike other parties studied in this thesis, which stand candidates in national elections as well.

Table 4.1 FNP Electoral Results Over Time

Year	Vote Share (Provincial Elections)	Governing Responsibility
2015	9,46%	Coalition Partner
2011	9,18%	Coalition Partner
2007	10,68%	In Opposition
2003	13,22%	In Opposition
1999	8,39%	In Opposition
1995	6,37%	In Opposition
1991	6,09%	In Opposition
1987	4,49%	In Opposition
1982	5,4%	In Opposition
1978	4,76%	In Opposition

Source: Kiesraad.nl

In the most recent provincial elections, the FNP won 9.46% of the votes and 4 seats on the Provincial Parliament. This was a slight increase from 2011, when the party won 9.18% of votes. The party also improved slightly in municipal elections, coming in second in 4 different municipalities. Despite a decrease in vote percentage, in 2011 the FNP became a member of the Provincial Parliament's ruling coalition for the first time. This coalition was in partnership with the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal) and PvdA (Labour Party). The shift from opposition to coalition partner was made possible by a fracturing of the larger parties' vote shares. The fracturing of larger parties' vote shares at local and provincial level is a trend across the Netherlands. In 2006, independent, local parties still took up the largest share of seats in municipal councils (Boogers and Voerman, 2010: 78). In 2015, a record number of regional parties took part in the provincial elections (NOS, 21.3.15). The pattern was true on a state level as well. One author quipped: "The party landscape has thereby become as flat as the country itself" (Van Holsteyn, 2011: 412).

After the 2015 elections, the FNP again went into coalition with the CDA, the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), and the SP (Socialist Party). The FNP currently has four members of the Frisian Provincial Parliament, and one member of the Frisian Provincial Executive, Johannes Kramer. Provincial elected members are supported by two staff members. The party also has a member of the Dutch Senate (the Tweede Kamer) who was elected as representative of the Netherlands-wide *Onafhankelijke Senaatsfractie* (the Independent Senate Group, OSF). The FNP is the largest member of this Senate group, which brings together regional parties.

Kramer's portfolio centres on the Frisian landscape and environment. This portfolio allocation emphasizes the centrality of environmental policy to the FNP. In coalition negotiations, "parties prefer, and aim to gain control over, ministries with a policy area of competence that was stressed in their election manifestos" (Bäck et al., 2011: 467). Kramer confirmed in an interview with regional news organisation Omrop Fryslan that the party's demands in the 2011 coalition negotiation centred on opposing wind turbines on Frisian land.[7]

The party's elected members pointed to the 2011 and 2015 coalition roles as an important impetus to policy development, since the position means the party has both new opportunities and new responsibilities. One member of the executive board explained: "We used to just be an opposition party. Then you can shout what you like, you don't have to make it come true." Another member of the executive board echoed this: "Before you could predominantly just shout about how everything shouldn't happen, now we need to say how it could be done better."

(2) Party Centralization

[7] "Fryslan DOK: De FNP." (2014). Omrop Fryslan. Accessed on 21 February 2018 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=67&v=5LeUEXc7fRI.

The FNP is a *decentralized* organisation. The party makes decisions from the bottom-up. The party is fairly small, with approximately 1500 members (as reported to the author in 2016). Its structures are grassroots and decentralized. The party is disaggregated into different local branches which have substantial autonomy, including in policy making. If local party policies fit into the FNP's seven fundamental values, each branch and city councillor group may have their own position on an issue.

This may sometimes hinder its collective decision-making process, as in the Dutch referendum on the EU-Ukraine deal. This referendum was held in 2015 and the FNP did not take a united party stance on the issue. One FNP elected member explained: "You had a group of supporters and a group of detractors [of the EU-Ukraine deal]. An elected member wrote an article in the provincial newsletter that the party wouldn't take a particular stance. It depends on your personal approach" (Interview 2). Nonetheless, party elites made public their stances on the referendum, leading to some division in the party membership who felt that this limited freedom of expression within the party.

The party encourages dialogue across the province through policy-specific 'theme evenings' as well as regional gatherings (for the North, Middle and South of Friesland). Centrally, the party has an executive board which is comprised of six party members from different regions of Friesland who take different portfolios or responsibilities. The board is supported by policy commissions on the European Free Alliance, finance, PR, party archives, and the party programme as well as the Provincial council members and the FNP's Dutch Senate representative. The committee on EFA is chaired by a member of the executive board, reinforcing that EFA membership is integrated and important in the structure of the party. The committee serves as an advice committee to the executive board of the party.

(3) Key Entrepreneurs

The FNP was one of nine founding members of the European Free Alliance. Since then, they have had an enduring EFA entrepreneur who sits on the board of EFA. This entrepreneur serves to link EFA and the FNP. FNP member Roelof Falkena helped found the party and joined the EFA Board in 1981. He served until 2004. He also held a position as a member of the Provincial Parliament for 11 years (1988-1999).[8] The importance of the EFA bureau member was set out from the start of EFA. EFA's history of Falkena notes that: "He knew how to use the tool of the EFA to channel Frisian interests at a European level."

After Roelof Falkena, the FNP's board member was Douwe Bijlsma. Bijlsma was posthumously awarded honorary EFA membership, was a provincial councillor for twelve years, and chairperson of the FNP for nine years. After Bijlsma's sudden death, provincial council member Sybren Posthumus became the EFA board member.

Finally, the position recently transitioned to Olrik Bouma. It is notable that the EFA bureau member has traditionally been an individual who is central to the FNP, often one of the few provincial councillors the party has. The FNP's EFA bureau member was described as 'our man in Brussels' (Interview 6). EFA board member Olrik Bouma formerly held positions as an EFA intern, Centre Maurits Coppetiers intern, and EFA Youth Secretary General. He is a member of the FNP's EFA Commission. The position on EFA's board allows the party to engage frequently with EFA through quarterly EFA board meetings and speeches/visits organised as a member of the EFA board (Interview 4). The FNP member of the EFA board also reports back to the FNP on EFA's initiatives and work.

[8] "European Free Alliance: Voice of the Peoples of Europe. The First 25 Years of History (1981-2006)." Published by EFA. Accessed on 21 February 2018 at http://www.e-f-a.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/EFA_25yrs.PDF.

(4) Issue Contestation

Studies of Dutch local parties have shown that “their ideological position on the classic left-right spectrum is vague, but they take clear and distinctive positions on local issues” (Booger sand Voerman, 2010: 85). The most distinctive and uncontested policy positions in the FNP are those on language and culture issues. However, the party is regularly developing further policy stances, particularly on their shared value of environmental protection. There are distinct divisions on electoral strategy, namely on whether or not the party should contest statewide elections.

Early Frisian regionalism was predominantly linguistic. FNP respondents lamented the infrequency of Frisian use in politics and noted the draw of the ‘randstad’ (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht) for young Frisians. Activism around Frisian issues (initially predominantly cultural and linguistic) resulted in the creation of the Frisian National Party in 1961. The FNP’s foundational focus on the Frisian dimension of policies can be exemplified by a 1973 party slogan: “Not left, not right, but Frisian national” (quoted in van der Zwet, 2011: 99). The FNP’s defense of Frisian interests and language are closely mapped onto one another. A more recent survey by Arno van der Zwet (2011, survey conducted 2009) showed that a concern about the Frisian language was the most important reason for joining the party for 22.6% of the FNP’s members. The defense of the Frisian language, identity and political decentralization are relatively uncontested policy areas in the FNP.

The development of a wider range of policies has been an explicit project in the FNP in the last few years. In a 2016 article in the Dutch state-wide paper *de Volksrant*, the party’s member of the provincial executive Johannes Kramer explained that the party felt it had the potential to appeal out to a broader audience: “We want to be a party for everyone. There is also a reason for this, because we notice that our supporters are growing. Furthermore, we do not

want to exclude people" (Bloemhof, 2016). One member of the FNP's executive board explained that this expansion of policies (on social welfare, education, energy) was driven by the executive's opinion that the FNP would benefit from "showing its colours" more (Interview 5).

Although the party leans towards the centre-left, "in the FNP, everyone is welcome. We have a right wing, a left wing, and a centrist wing' (Interview 2). These differences in the party are most obvious in the case of asylum seeker and immigration policies. Anti-immigrant views are neither organised nor accepted by the party organisationally (van der Zwet, 2016: 1249). However, about 18% of members agree with the statement that 'It is better for a country if everyone shares the same customs and traditions' (van der Zwet, 2016: 1250). The underlying value of internationalism has been challenged with the influx of asylum seekers in recent years. When Frisian towns are asked to accept asylum seekers, the bottom up decision-making process of the party has led to different responses by the FNP across the province (Interview 2; van Es, 2014).

On issues like refugee resettlement, issue contestation leads to diverse policy positions across the province. This reflects the FNP's decentralized decision-making process. One FNP staff member explained: "The most important thing for the FNP is that governance comes from the bottom up, from the bottom outward" (Interview 7). Some have questioned the party's decision to expand its policy platform. A member of the FNP's executive board explained, "if you let the Frisian element fall away, then you're just gone. It's what differentiates us from the other parties" (Interview 8). Local meetings about the expansion of the party's programme were met with some scepticism from membership (Interview 8).

The party's provincial election manifestos expanded from 16 to 30 pages between 2011 and 2015. Policy development particularly occurred in

environmental policy. There are three drivers for the focus on the environment. First, as the party transitions to be a governing party, it seeks to use the levers available to it. Provinces in the Netherlands are largely administrative and where they have the most autonomous decision-making power is in the planning of infrastructure, housing and the environment (van der Zwet, 2011: 95). Second, environmental policy is aligned with making Friesland more Frisian. Environmental policy allows the FNP to protect the Frisian landscape, which is seen as unique and typically Frisian (Interview 5). Third, the party membership overwhelmingly agrees on the environmental agenda. Van der Zwet's 2011 FNP survey data shows that members see investing in environmentally friendly policies as a high priority (7.53 on a scale from 0 to 10). Environmental policy thus performs many functions for the party: developing the party's ideological basis, using its new powers, and satisfying the party membership's interest in defending Frisian identity.

Finally, running in state-wide elections has been a longstanding discussion within the party. One FNP elected member explained: "It has always been at play in the party. It has always split the party because a large proportion of our supporters actually support other parties at national level" (Interview 3). The care with which party elites consider the issue is revealed in the trade off made between the FNP and researcher Arno van der Zwet. Van der Zwet received funding and party support for his survey with only one condition— "that the survey included 3 questions that related to the FNP's participation in the Dutch general elections" (2011: 63). The efforts to collect data on membership attitudes towards running in state-wide elections also shows the importance in the FNP of gaining support from members. This reflects the party's decentralized decision-making process and the higher level of disagreement on electoral strategy.

4.3 Transnational Interactions

While the FNP is decentralized in its decision-making processes, the European Free Alliance plays a central role for its organisational elite. The EFA Committee includes members of the party's board as well as the FNP's member of the EFA Board. This allows for a clear line of communication between the FNP and EFA executives. But what is communicated in these lines? And with whom does the FNP communicate most in EFA?

FNP elites indicate that membership of the European Free Alliance "expands your horizons," "provides inspiration," and "is a piece of motivation" (Interview 2, 4, 5, and 6). Before considering the consequences of transnational interactions, I consider with whom the FNP engages. Van der Zwet argues that the FNP is part of a 'little EFA' group, which brings together parties with a focus on language/culture and which resemble political movements rather than parties (van der Zwet, 2015: 69). However, the FNP's interactions do go beyond this grouping, as shown in Figure 4.2. This network visualization was created by coding interview respondents' positive mentions of other parties.

Electorally successful parties like the SNP, ERC, and Plaid Cymru are central. Respondents also reported interactions based around cultural events, such as with geographically and culturally close parties like Die Friesen. Interview respondent 2 also reported non-party cultural relationships with other regions (Graubunden, Andalucia). Finally, members also reported relationships based in similar energy policy concerns (such as the Süd-Tiroler Freiheit). The basis for these relationships will be further explored in this section.

Lack of membership in EFA does not preclude contact. For example, EFA is developing closer relationships with Faroese political party Republic (Republic's youth branch is already a member of EFA youth) (Interviews 10 and 11; EFA Press Release, 4.9.15).

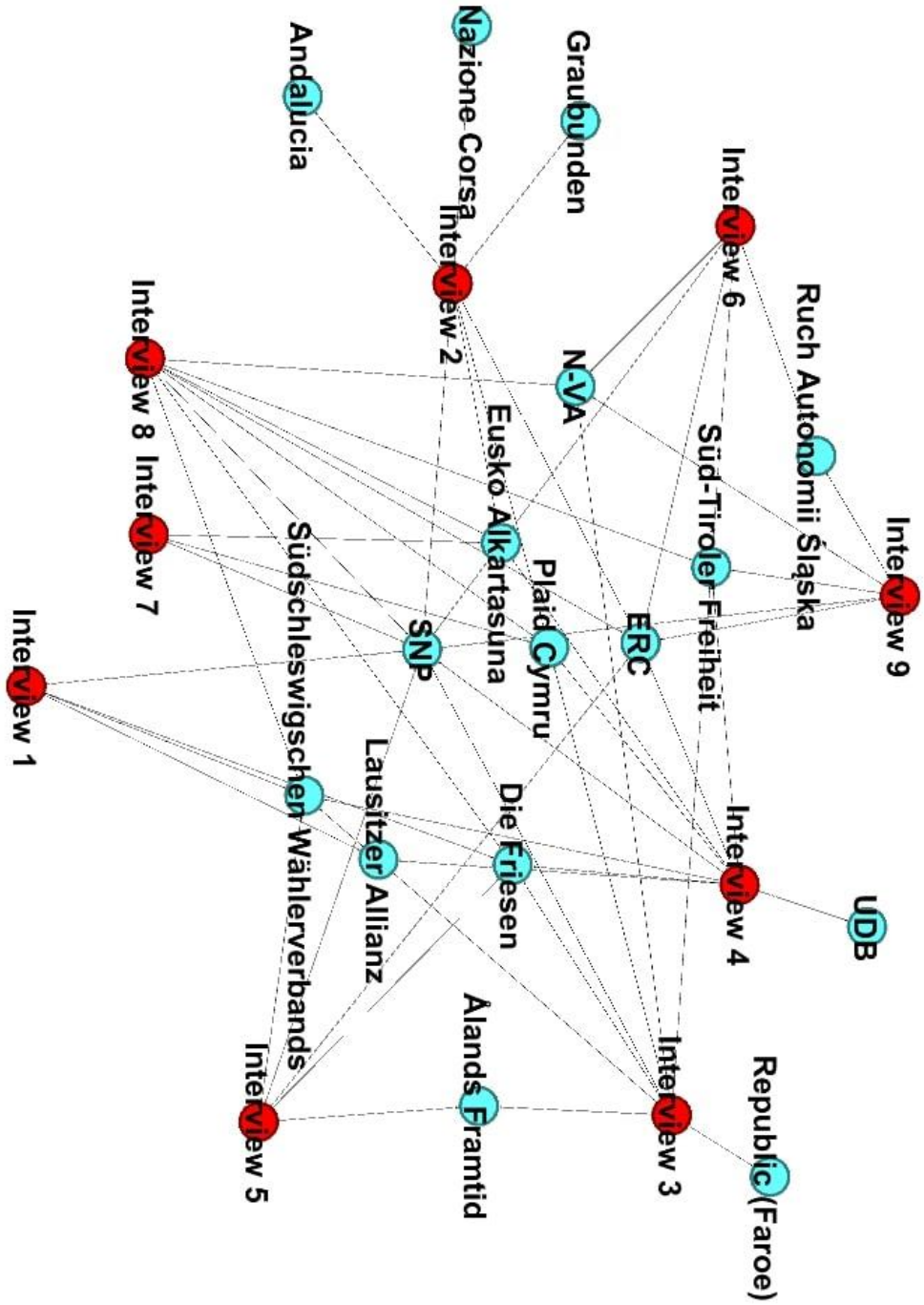


Figure 4.2 SNA Visualization of FNP Relationships in EFA

(1) Key Partners

There are core parties of interest to the FNP which are shared by most respondents: the SNP, Plaid Cymru, the Flemish N-VA, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), and Basque Eusko Alkartasuna (EA). Most regions mentioned (12/16) are either 'Northern European' or Germanophone (in the case of South Tyrol). This is consistent with FNP elites' characterization of their relationships in EFA. Most respondents noted that the closest partners in the European Free Alliance were those that shared cultural and geographical characteristics. One respondent outlined a 'North West' EFA group, which included broadly the Welsh, Scots, Flemish, Frisians, and minorities in Germany. The group was differentiated by its history and its more moderate and non-violent approach to the central state (Interview 6). Another suggested the FNP's partners all shared a 'North Sea culture.'

This 'northern' network also includes Frisian partners, particularly Die Friesen (a German Frisian regionalist party). During the period of study, Die Friesen was a member of EFA. However, a well-connected FNP respondent explained that interactions with Die Friesen went beyond the EFA network and extended into inter-Frisian networks and a bilateral relationship (Interview 1). The FNP's website also notes: "By actively engaging with the FNP, now also two Frisian political parties in North and East Friesland (German states) have become active in the EFA context. These are the SSW (Schleswig-Holstein) and Die Friesen (East Friesland)." The FNP have worked towards a "Cultural Treaty" with the SSW which focused on "the European collaboration of the regions on the North Sea coast, the sea dykes, the Wadden Sea Landscape, the trilateral Wadden Academy, the geese and the European Interreg projects."[9] Other Frisian partners are thus seen as close to the FNP independent of EFA.

[9] "FNP on a working visit to the party in office SSW in Schleswig-Holstein." Accessed on 28 February at http://www.fnp.frl/english/news/16/.

These bilateral relationships facilitate both institutional and political collaboration. For example, subsequent EFA membership (in 2008 by Die Friesen and 2009 by the SSW) is seen as a success of the FNP's networking. In 2018 Die Friesen chose to leave EFA due to a perceived lack of support from EFA for a court case in the European Court of Human Rights (Partei Die Friesen v. Germany). However, one FNP member explained, that while this disagreement was disappointing, the FNP would continue engagement with Die Friesen. Thus, Frisian and EFA networks are overlapping but not dependent on one another; interview respondents clearly separated Frisian cultural networks from EFA.

Some of the most commonly mentioned parties are outside of the 'northern' group: ERC, EA and the PNC. These parties belong to another group of interest to the FNP: high profile, successful movements. The chairman of the EFA Commission explained of the SNP and ERC: "You have the bigger players that are your examples" (Interview 5). Every respondent mentioned the Scottish National Party. Seventeen FNP members were funded by the FNP's Senate group (the OSF) to travel to Edinburgh in 2014 to study the Scottish referendum vote. One member noted: "of course, the SNP is much further along than the FNP" (Interview 8).

The relationship is not mutual, due to this power imbalance. FNP interview respondents expressed having difficulty contacting the SNP (Interviews 5, 8, 9). At an FNP-led meeting at the EFA conference in 2017 one FNP member noted with resignation: "I would have liked to see a member of the SNP here." Another respondent contrasted the FNP's relationship with the Lusatian Alliance, which was described as mutual to the relationship with the SNP. He explained, "When the Sorbs come, they learn from us and we also learn from them. From the Scots, we learn" (Interview 1). Asymmetry in relationships affects the regularity of interactions.

(2) Varied Modes of Interaction

Parties can also be separated into those the FNP would like to work with on specific issues (energy policy, language policies, campaigning strategies) and those that have a more emotive, solidarity relationship. This latter function could be more superficial, with less information exchanged. For example, when EFA provides information regarding political prisoners in the Basque country, “we find that interesting to hear, but we don’t have the same understanding and connection to it because we don’t have political prisoners in Friesland” (Interview 3).

The FNP has a more project-based approach to EFA than the other parties studied in this thesis. The structured engagement may be facilitated by the small number of elites and the initiative of the FNP’s EFA Committee. Currently, the party is developing a project on sustainable energy in sub-state regions. This feeds into the party’s local activism against gas extraction and wind turbines. The regional sustainable energy project was launched in 2016 and continues to the present. It included a conference in Leeuwarden in the autumn of 2017 and panels at EFA General Assemblies (2016, 2017 and 2018). This project is progressed by the FNP’s EFA Commission and a newly created regional sustainable energy commission. The consequences of this “Sustainable Energy in a Europe of the Regions” projects will be explored further in the next section.

The FNP also saw its visit to Edinburgh as a structured project and the delegation wrote a report based on their interviews with Scottish voters done in Edinburgh during the 2014 referendum vote. This was shared with the party’s executive and with other OSF parties across the Netherlands. The formal and elite led approach to EFA interaction stands in contrast to other parties’ approaches which are more driven by informal relationships and individual initiative. The formal nature of the FNP’s transnational interactions implies that

consulting EFA is somewhat of an organisational routine, most simply defined as ‘recurrent interaction patterns’ (Becker, 2005).

Face-to-face and project-based interactions are supported by knowledge gained from afar through reading articles, following other parties on Twitter, and other social media platforms. For example, before the 2014 visit to Edinburgh, all FNP members on the trip were required to read ‘a number of articles about the political situation in Scotland, the run-up to the referendum, and the arguments for and against independence.’[10] One active member, who had been an EFA bureau member, explained that the first line of follow up after an international visit was often to find contacts on social media and share his experiences from the visit (both photos and written reflection). Through these linkages online, the FNP also receives “support via social media, via Facebook and Twitter. EFA sends press releases, newsletters, and updates on events. It’s a constant information stream” (Interview 4). Another noted that visits from other EFA partners led to social media friendships, and after repeated interactions, “eventually people will begin to meet up with each other spontaneously” (Interview 1).

Social media contacts are not seen as replacements for direct interaction. One respondent noted: “It often happens that when you speak to people it’s really positive, and they say, ‘oh yeah that’s a good idea.’ Then later it’s difficult to get traction and to really set something up” (Interview 9). The FNP’s high level of interaction in EFA through a project and research-based approach suggests that they will regularly receive information, although this quote suggests interactions may not always lead to sustained exchange.

4.4 Learning in the Frisian National Party

[10] “Studiereis referendum over toekomst Schotland: Rapportage voor OSF.” Party report on the 2014 Scotland trip provided by interview respondent.

Transnational interactions may lead to FNP learning through information exchange and the process of learning which may subsequently cause behavioural change. This section will apply the political party learning framework. In the first instance, I consider the process of learning by asking whether FNP members (individually or collectively) acquired, interpreted and implemented information from EFA partners. I consider the FNP's learning through nine interviews, predominantly with members of the party's executive and elected members, and analysis of relevant documents. All interviews and documents were collected and transcribed in Dutch.

Four policy areas emerged as central to the party: energy policy, campaign strategy, Frisian language protection, and refugee resettlement. The FNP learns on two main issues of policy development: environmental sustainability and campaign strategy. Interestingly, the first is not a contested issue but it is an area of policy development whereas the second is highly contested. This alters the process of learning, particularly in the stage of information interpretation. The FNP also provides two cases where one might expect learning. The first, Frisian language protection, is the topic of transnational relationships but outwith the European Free Alliance. The second, refugee resettlement, is an international and European issue but the high level of internal disagreement means that the FNP has not interacted with transnational partners on refugee policy. As such, following these four cases through the proposed theoretical framework of political party learning provides a useful way to study cases in which learning does occur and in which it does not.

(1) Information Acquisition

The party actively acquires information from EFA partners on two issues: sustainable energy policy and campaign strategies. In this section, I review how information was passed from EFA partners to the FNP. I also consider a case where information transmission is not mediated through EFA (language

protection) and one where there is little to no information acquired from EFA partners (refugee resettlement). I consider why the FNP showed little interest in acquiring information from EFA partners on asylum seeker resettlement, despite the salience of the issue in Friesland, the Netherlands and across the EU.

Sustainable Energy

The FNP's regional sustainable energy project, entitled 'Sustainable Energy in a Europe of the Regions,' seeks to ensure that: "European regions can better organise their strategies and policies for Sustainable Energy, as well as co-operate and learn from each other" (EFA Press Release, 28/7/17). The project is comprised of two substantive elements: research into renewable technology suitable for regions (especially but not only Friesland) and research into the political opportunities that exist for regions on sustainable energy development. Although organised primarily by a group within the FNP, the European Free Alliance helped coordinate events, funded the project, and attended events. Meetings to work on the project were held at the 2016, 2017, and 2018 EFA General Assemblies and an October 2017 conference in Leeuwarden.

This conference provides a good case study of how the FNP acquires information from other EFA parties. The conference was attended by most of the FNP's elected members, current and previous EFA bureau members, and the FNP's EFA Committee members. International presenters included the Director of EFA, a Plaid Cymru economic adviser, the leader of the SSW, international legal expert Ana Stanic, and an energy expert from Galicia. Attendees also included a representative from Valencian party Compromis and Miguel Martinez Tomey, who is responsible for the Europeans Affairs of Chunta Aragonesista (CHA) and an EFA Vice President. The aims of the project and the diversity of attendees suggest that the space would be rich in information exchange.

In presentations, international presenters imparted information about the specific situation in their regions—for example, the use of small scale solar panel developments and people-centered projects in Schleswig Holstein or the use of hydro-electric plants and on-shore wind projects in Galicia. In summary slides about the conference, the FNP noted that presentations were very technical and provided a large amount of data. The FNP's 'wrap up' after the conference noted that these presentations 'confirmed knowledge about energy sources, including their business impact.'[11]

Formal presentations were complemented by informal 'break out' sessions which were meant to be more action oriented. Informal spaces also revealed some difficulties for the FNP in *incorporating* ideas that were imparted by attendees. For example, in one break out session the discussion quickly became very specifically Frisian and sometimes strayed away from English as its main language. Although translation was attempted, the disparity in Dutch speakers versus English speakers (only 1 or 2 in a room with 15 plus participants) made this difficult. While at the EFA General Assembly, this also sometimes caused difficulty. While the plenary GA sessions are fully translated, the breakout sessions were not always so. Other informal spaces, such as lunch times saw similar linguistic division, with people tending to communicate with those they already knew. Linguistic and cultural division thus hindered further acquisition; the predominance of Frisian attendees meant that Frisian-specific information rather than information from other regions was more likely to be discussed.

Many of the 'Northern' connections posited as important by the FNP materialized but the project also drew connections to 'southern' regions with similar energy concerns (Galicia in the October conference, and Corsica in the 2017 EFA GA meeting). It is interesting in the follow-up slides uploaded to

[11] 'EFA SEC2017 Conference' slides. Published at www.sec2017.eu. Accessed 25 February 2018. http://sec2017.eu/index_htm_files/Presentation%20Oct-27-28-th-EFA%20conf-Web-English.pdf

sec2017.eu that the FNP mentions specifically that, in its relationship with EFA on energy they should “mind specifically the Spanish situation.” However, the SNP and ERC are largely absent from the sustainable energy process. This shows another barrier in information acquisition about environmental policy. Members of the FNP’s organizing team expressed a desire to have SNP representatives at the October 2017 conference. However, they persistently received no response from SNP contacts.

Electoral Strategy

What do FNP elites take away from their interactions with high profile EFA partners? The SNP was mentioned multiple times as a party that runs in state-wide elections. One respondent noted, “The SNP was a relatively small party but at some point, they did go to London and to the European Parliament…they are now the biggest party in Scotland, the most important opposition party in Westminster” (Interview 4). Another noted his interest in the way that the SNP strategically used the bedroom tax, the way they ‘replaced the local left-wing party,’ and their influence in Westminster (Interview 5). A third respondent noted that the SNP was seen as closely related to the Scottish people and positioned itself in opposition to the ‘neglect’ of Scotland by Labour and the Conservatives (Interview 8). Another noted the organised process of the 2014 referendum, and the way it reflected the trust of the Scottish people (Interview 7).

In 2014, seventeen FNP members went to Edinburgh during the Scottish referendum process. The FNP’s overview of their trip explained that “purpose of the visit was to research the referendum process, from which lessons could be taken for Friesland and other regions in the Netherlands and Europe.” The party’s members interviewed 168 voters, across 18 polling places in Edinburgh. The referendum visit centered on gathering information about the process of the referendum, rather than the policy of independence. The lack of policy-

related exchange may be due to the way that information is acquired. Rather than through face to face interaction with SNP members, information acquired on the trip was from Scottish *voters*. Given the lack of response from SNP contacts, in the FNP information about the SNP is often sourced through reading the news or mediated through EFA. Although the FNP invests in understanding Scotland, the SNP is seen as 'holding itself at a distance' (Interview 9).

Frisian Language Protection

Despite the centrality of language policy to the FNP's programme, it is rarely mentioned as a topic of transnational relationships. This lack of transnational interaction seems to stem from a lack of internal FNP disagreement on linguistic protection as a central value. In fact, transnational relationships with other parties seemed to be more about information sharing from the FNP *to* other parties than about acquisition. For example, when speaking of the Sorbs in Germany, one respondent involved in the EFA Commission noted: "We are a bit stronger than those parties. We can help them with their survival, party governance, and building supporters" (Interview 5).

With parties that are more successful than the FNP, the issue of interest is not language. The FNP's policy adviser explained:

> "Look, in Friesland language is a really important part of people's identity. That's why in our province it's an important policy. But in Europe there are a lot of issues. It is also really varied how regional parties deal with identity and such issues. For example, in Catalonia, they have a strong identity…their identity has more to do with the economy and with politics, just like in Scotland" (Interview 6).

One transnational language project emerged from outside of EFA. The FNP has institutional access, through the Leeuwarden City of Culture bid, to a delegation from the Basque Country. This visit was organised as part of San Sebastian's City of Culture which has a 'project to set up a protocol of linguistic rights.' One respondent who had been involved in the cooperation explained:

“A delegation came to Leeuwarden and they invited several people to speak to them. We [the FNP] also gave our input” (Interview 8). On the language policies in the FNP, policies are very settled and transnational information exchange flows predominantly outwards. Furthermore, language policy is not wholly party political; it is also channelled through other organisations (such as the Bureau of Small Languages, the Inter-Frisian Council).

Refugee Resettlement

Finally, another issue of importance in recent years in Friesland is the resettlement of refugees. While it was referred to as a salient policy issue, no FNP elites mentioned drawing on EFA partners for information about this policy area. Given the European Union’s partial competence on refugee policy, I would expect this policy area to have a more transnational element. One hindrance to transnational information acquisition on the issue of refugees is the diverse range of opinions on the matter.

Migration is a salient issue in the Netherlands. The Party for Freedom (PVV) fought the 2006 and 2010 parliamentary elections on an anti-immigration (anti-Islamic) and anti-establishment ticket (Mair 2008). Their vote share increased considerably in 2010 so that they became the 3rd largest party with 15.5% of the vote. In Friesland they won only 11.4% of the vote. One FNP city councilor said: “It’s a European problem and one that we, in our manifesto, we take very seriously. We are proponents of taking in refugees. Now that they are coming in large numbers, we have a lot of emergency reception centres in Friesland” (Interview 3).

Despite this positive party position towards refugees, concern about the issue of refugee integration is not alien to Friesland. For example, in one municipality (Rijs), residents’ protests led to the rejection of a proposed asylum seeker center by an FNP/CDA coalition council (Schravesande et al., 2015). The issue is ‘very sensitive,’ explained one elected member. They elaborated: “We have

a lot of unemployed people, the highest percentage in the Netherlands. Our unemployed residents also want a job" (Interview 3). Given the FNP's bottom up approach to policy making, the party is likely to be reactive and sensitive to local variation on the issues.

Since the integration of asylum seekers is a local competence, each municipal council group can develop their own policy on the issue. One city's group's manifesto explained: "The FNP wants to comply with the statutory task when it comes to making homes for status holders available (asylum seekers with a residence status) …However, the FNP is of the opinion that the supervision and integration of these new residents can be managed much better" (2018 Manifesto, Waadhoeke FNP).

Other municipal manifestos were more direct about their claims: "The integration of immigrants should gain more attention without negatively affecting identity...New citizens and businesses outside of Friesland should be informed about the bilingual situation" (2018 Manifesto, Dantumadiel and Heerenveen FNP). Another municipality yet noted that money spent on refugee integration would be better spent on helping people in their own region (i.e. on international aid) (2018 Manifesto, Kollumerlan FNP). More than half of municipalities had no mention of the refugee issue in their programmes, while others included an entire paragraph on integration. This shows the disparity of interest across Friesland.

Most of the key actors that work regularly with EFA are based at provincial, rather than municipal level. Given the municipal competency and divisions on the issue, elites may not see it as advantageous or appropriate to use EFA to acquire information on refugee/asylum-seeker policy. The lack of engagement with EFA partners on refugee and asylum seeker policy stands in contrast to the FNP's active, organised and targeted information acquisition on environmental policy and Scottish campaign strategies. It shows how internal

contestation and decentralized decision making in the FNP can hinder information acquisition from EFA partners.

(2) Information Interpretation

In the two cases where the FNP acquired information from their transnational interactions, the party and its elites would then interpret that information. Interpretation is the process through which individuals and groups make meaning of information and adapt it to the specific case of their party. The FNP displays a mostly uniform, collective interpretation of sustainable energy information but discordant interpretations of campaign strategies. This reflects its existing divisions on electoral strategy and shared interpretation of the importance of the Frisian landscape (sustainability is one of its seven core values). Agreement on the interpretation of information about environmental sustainability allows for the party to continue along the learning process. Disagreement on electoral strategy means that learning about campaign strategies is kept at an individual rather than collective level.

As noted in the previous section, much of the information imparted through the 'Sustainable Energy in Europe' project is technical. However, the way it is interpreted shows the importance of pre-existing policy on the learning process. This confirms existing understanding of the use of evidence in policy making which argued that existing attitudes shape the way that people interpret information. As one author wrote: "It need not be the content of the research, or even its truth, that counts…but the *zeitgeist.* If it contradicts the *zeitgeist* it will have a harder time getting through" (Kogan, 1999: 12).

Evidence that confirms the existing perspective of the FNP is thus much more likely to be internalized and adapted by party members. For example, the Galician scientist invited suggested that on-shore wind turbines were an important part of the Galician energy mix. In a subsequent breakout session, one member of the FNP explained: "In Spain, wind turbines don't bother me,

but Friesland is a very flat, old country. Wind turbines don't have a human character." Another Frisian attendee, from an anti-wind farm community action group, argued: "Wind mills aren't half as efficient as people say they are." Existing policies and internal pressures in Friesland thus meant that the Galician experience of on-shore wind was seen as irrelevant.

While the stance on wind farms was influential in the FNP's interpretation, so was the party's focus on regional autonomy. The emphasis on regional environmental mobilization (as opposed to statewide action) is confirmed by EFA partners. One respondent explained that the parties who engage with the FNP on the energy policy have a reason: they have often experienced the most negative effects of central state energy policies, in places like South Tyrol and Silesia (Interview 9). Transnational interactions confirm the urgency of FNP action. This can be seen in their conclusion that the party must: "hurry with such plans and approach the government in The Hague…and do so before others (like ministerial staff) develop plans for Friesland."

The emphasis on standing up to the central state and finding alternative sustainable energy sources to wind turbines in the FNP is to be expected. Existing understandings affect interpretations, because "people are more likely to 'see something when they believe it' rather than 'believe it when they see it'" (Crossan et al., 1999: 528). Thus, in its official party interpretation, the FNP relied on shared understandings of environmentalism and regionalism. This was particularly possible because the project was underpinned by the party's core values, very technical, and led by a small group of elites.

On the other hand, the interpretations of the SNP's campaign strategy were much less united. This acquired information led to varied individual interpretations in the FNP. A few elites advocate running in statewide elections and interpret the SNP's success as support for this argument. One elected member with strong links in EFA explained: "Will we take part in Dutch

elections, alongside other regional parties? Well, the SNP sits in Westminster, Plaid Cymru too. The Catalan and Basque parties sit in Madrid and they all sit in the European Parliament. These are steps the FNP still has to make" (Interview 4). Another respondent said: "you see that the SNP also sits directly in the UK Parliament. If you look at strategy, it does give us the idea that we should take that challenge to join the Tweede Kamer, maybe within the OSF" (Interview 5). These elites have used EFA partners to justify the feasibility of their position on campaign strategy.

However, others interpret the SNP's success as a function of how much they understand their *local* constituents rather than related to their campaign strategy at statewide level. For example, one member of the EFA Commission explained: "The other parties, like Labour and the Conservatives, neglected Scotland. They did little for Scotland and Scots felt excluded from those parties. The SNP orients itself to Scotland and that determines the attractiveness of the party" (Interview 8). An FNP elected member cautioned that Friesland could not be directly compared to Scotland due to divergent histories: "Friesland has never been an independent political unit, like in Scotland, Wales or Flanders" (Interview 3). Pre-existing contestation within the party is reflected in interpretations of the SNP's success.

Finally, there was some discussion of the example of the Scottish referendum in 2014. Respondents who mentioned the 2014 Scottish independence referendum interpreted it as a *mechanism* that would be useful in a Frisian context, within the FNP's more moderate autonomy claims. One respondent who attended the referendum observation explained: "It is naturally an example of, were we to ever do something like that here, how it should be done and what shouldn't be done" (Interview 4). An FNP elected member said to a local radio station: "Friesland isn't the same as Scotland, so they aren't completely comparable, but a referendum would be possible here" (2014 Omrop Fryslan interview). The post Scottish referendum report, written by a member of the

FNP's executive board, concluded: "For Friesland/the Netherlands, a referendum can be an excellent democratic means to involve the population and make a statement about the future of an area."

(3) Information Implementation

In this final part of the learning process, information which has been internalized and adapted would then be applied within the party. In some cases, this implementation will be more internal (i.e. changing the arguments used, reinforcing existing positions) but in other cases information implementation might be reflected in changed behaviour (such as manifesto commitments, strategic choices). In the case of the FNP, the sustainable energy project confirmed existing policies and provided evidence for the FNP's rejection of wind energy and promotion of alternative energy sources (geothermal and solar). On the other hand, the campaign strategy information, drawn predominantly from the SNP, did not lead to a collective change in the FNP because of the lack of a collective interpretation. However, it did strengthen some individual elite members beliefs in the appropriate way forward. Finally, although the causality is not fully attributable, it is likely that the Scottish referendum encouraged FNP members to propose the mechanism in their 2015 manifesto.

On sustainable energy, there is not a change in the party's policy from 2016 onwards, as sustainability is a long-standing value. However, the project has been used to develop further evidence and conviction for existing stances. For example, in the press release after the energy conference, the party noted that: "The presentations showed that Friesland had a large potential for sustainable energy. Therefore, we are looking particularly at geothermal energy, solar energy and wind turbines at sea" (FNP press release, October 2017). The FNP has suggested that the next steps in the project include seminars on specific issues (like energy storage), workshops at the EFA conference, providing

advice based on existing evidence, further studies (drawing on technical universities), and developing a sustainable energy development team (within EFA).

Members expressed their willingness to learn in an iterative manner, particularly focused on the development of a more cooperative approach. For example, between the 2016 EFA GA and the 2017 EFA GA in Katowice the party was unable to activate some of the contacts it had made. However, one FNP respondent involved in the Sustainable Energy Commission explained: “Now we have re-initiated those contacts in Katowice and the question is what kind of result comes from this. It’s kind of like a repeat of the same situation, but maybe it will go better now” (Interview 9).

The repetitiveness of learning processes, and the way in which they feed into further learning, touches on a key feature of learning implementation. Learning and the problems it is used to solve “evolve through a multistage, iterative process. Every implementation action simultaneously changes policy problems, policy resources, and policy objectives. New issues, new requirements, new considerations emerge as the process unfolds” (McLaughlin, 1987: 174). It would be interesting, in further research, to follow a learning process over a wider span of time to explore this dynamic.

A further, likely unintended, behavioural outcome of the project is a higher amount of engagement from FNP members with EFA. Since the project was launched, there have been more FNP members attending EFA events “to build up contacts, to interact with others. So now there are also more people in the FNP who have direct contact with other EFA parties” (Interview 9).

On electoral strategy, individuals’ beliefs have been affected by the examples of more successful parties, especially the SNP. One Provincial Council member, who was also highly active in EFA, expressed that the Scottish

example encouraged him to push for more action and ambition in the party. He explained:

> "The FNP already has a vision for the future of Friesland and it means that we want more powers, more autonomy, more powers, but now the implementation. That is taking a long time. The party really has to step up…It will be important in the coming years: are we constantly in a comfort zone or are we moving forward? You may lose members, but it offers chances. The SNP was a pretty small party, but at a certain moment they went to London…Well, we still have that way to go" (Interview 4).

Political party elite recognize the need to get party buy in, to disperse information they have acquired, and the risks that are posed by attempting party change. As noted previously in the chapter, these risks center around moving beyond the parties' core belief of language and Frisian cultural defense and beginning to take stronger positions on state wide issues. This is particularly complicated by the FNP's *decentralized* decision making structure. Multiple elites emphasized the need to follow party procedures (decision making 'from the bottom up') and that the general party would need to be convinced before the choice to run in statewide elections (Interviews 3, 4, 8).

The SNP example is implemented in FNP elites' beliefs, but it is yet to translate to collective learning. One member of the FNP's executive bureau noted that at a recent FNP members' gathering: "There was conflict over the role of language policy. There were groups within the party that felt we should let the Frisian element sail. We need to expand the party through a more generalizable programme…we had elaborate conversations about [expanding the party programme] but this was turned down so it will stay as it is" (Interview 8).

It is possible to consider a third point of party learning around the FNP's interpretation of the SNP. That is, respondents suggested that the 2014 Scottish referendum showed that a referendum was a feasible democratic mechanism in Friesland. This was a view presented in both interviews and the

party's report of its trip (which was also shared with the party). In the party's 2011 referendum, the party suggested that administrative "reclassifications must be demonstrably supported by a substantial majority of the residents concerned. That is possible, if at least it was the subject of the council elections or else with a referendum" (p. 5).

However, in 2015 the party promoted a much more proactive policy that called for a referendum on autonomy. The 2015 manifesto noted that: "the FNP wants the province to start a broad discussion among the residents of Friesland...This should culminate in a referendum at the same time as the municipal elections in 2017 about whether and how Friesland and the Frisians get more say in hospitals, housing corporations and healthcare institutions" (p. 6). The 2019 manifesto confirmed this policy. It is difficult to attribute direct causality from the 2014 referendum to this stronger policy on holding a referendum, it is possible that the experience of the Scottish referendum emboldened the FNP's policy in this area. The party also proposes a specific question and date for the referendum, two points they noted as commendable in the Scottish process.

4.5 Conclusion

The European Free Alliance has been central to the way that the FNP expresses its core value of internationalism. The FNP has both a structural role in EFA (a bureau membership) and a structural role for EFA in the FNP (the EFA Commission). The FNP uses the European Free Alliance to build up relationships with regionalists across Europe, although they are not solely transnationally active through EFA. Inter-Frisian connections and minority language protection organisations offer alternative routes of cross-border cooperation. The FNP used EFA connections to develop a sustainable energy project, which brought numerous EFA parties as well as EFA central staff to Friesland. They also built up more distant connections to the SNP, often using virtual means and travelling to Scotland to understand the independence

process. Both of these information acquisition processes engendered learning in different ways.

The FNP primarily learned on *uncontested* area of policy, environmental sustainability. Although the general ideological stance on sustainability was agreed, the FNP's small size and limited policy platform led them to expand and detail their policy on environmental sustainability. Learning thus occurred as part of a process of policy development. The joint EFA-FNP "Sustainable Energy in a Europe of the Regions" project and October 2017 conference thus provided a space for adopting new evidence and arguments to support their Frisian environmentalism. It is notable that where the party had strong policies (i.e. anti-onshore wind), new information was not incorporated.

On electoral strategy there was no such pre-existing agreement on policy. While the status quo and members tended towards protecting the Frisian specificity of the party, numerous elites sought to alter the party's strategy. They encouraged the party to enter statewide elections, drawing on examples from other EFA member parties. Different stances between elites and members of the FNP on this strategic choice, *contestation* and the need for negotiation, meant that the process of learning was halted at the level of individual interpretation of information. Individuals interpreted and internalized information about other regionalist parties, but they were unable to disseminate this information and engender collective party learning.

The FNP also provides two examples of policy areas that were salient to the party but did not display learning, despite some indications that they would. The first is the central policy of minority language protection, which the FNP shares with many of its EFA partners. However, given their developed policy on language protection, the FNP saw itself more as a transmitter of information on this issue. Furthermore, Friesland had also developed administrative and third sector organisations which mediate transnational relationships on

language protection. As such, just as issue contestation leads FNP elites to seek information, a strongly agreed and developed policy area may discourage learning. The second case of non-learning is on refugee resettlement policy. Although this is a European issue, the municipal level of decision making on the implementation of resettlement and the *decentralized* nature of FNP decision making mean that the party does not acquire information from EFA partners on refugee and asylum seeker policy.

The FNP's transnational interactions, guided by the European Free Alliance, allowed them to acquire information on partners (particularly those with more *electoral success*) such as the SNP and policy areas such as environmental sustainability. This information acquisition led to some further learning, both at a collective level (in the case of the environmental project) and individually (in the case of electoral strategy). Learning was particularly useful to support elites' arguments. It allowed them to support calls for alternative types of renewable energy with technical information and cases from abroad (for example, Galicia). Some elites also called on the Scottish example to support their preferences on electoral strategy and the choice of a referendum mechanism for autonomism.

The FNP case does provide some useful caveats to the proposed party-political learning framework. First, the contextual factor of *governing responsibility* was complicated in the FNP case. In Chapter One, I proposed that governing responsibility will reduce learning due to the increased responsibility in government. As a minority coalition partner, the FNP does not fully fit the role of a governing party. However, the FNP's role in provincial government incentivizes the party to develop its policy on its key coalition demand of sustainable energy. Sustainable energy is subsequently a key area of transnational learning for the party, indicating that there may be a further contextual factor of the effect of coalition positions on party learning.

It would also be useful to consider how the contextual factors affect parties in a more complex configuration, how contextual factors interact with one another. For example, the FNP's mixture of decentralized decision making and its internal contestation on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers meant that the party did not acquire European level information on that policy area. The grounded approach taken in this thesis allows me to unpack the way that ideological and institutional factors shape the movement of information between political parties in the EU.

Chapter Five: l'Union Démocratique Bretonne

The Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB) is a small regionalist party that defends Breton regional culture and promotes autonomy from a foundation of left wing politics. The UDB is based in Brittany, which can be understood as a 'region of very strong contrasts' (Pasquier, 2014: 29). The region is characterized by two regional languages (Gallo and Breton), dual capitals (Rennes and Nantes), and political tension between Gaullist centralization and Celtic regionalism. Brittany also contrasts with the rest of France; the region consistently has a higher Socialist and lower Front National vote (Pasquier, 2014: 28). Within this context, the UDB was founded in 1964. In its early days, the party particularly employed the concept of internal colonialism and combatted what it saw as colonialist politics both at home and abroad (Rogers, 1996: 551).

The UDB remains a small party with around 500 members[12] and little governing power. Having distanced itself from its more communist roots, the UDB is now a left wing, environmentalist and autonomist party. Left-wing regionalism has been entrenched by the presence of radical right-wing Breton regionalist parties (previously POBL and currently Adsav). The party's strong ideological stance, Celtic cultural connections, and small size affect their role in the EFA network and the way they move through the learning process.

This chapter finds that the UDB displays learning, to varying degrees, in four different cases. The party's elites display learning in their promotion of a more autonomous electoral strategy (a contentious issue). Meanwhile, learning on campaign strategies are more technocratic and 'scientific.' Finally, information is acquired on areas of importance to members of the UDB: regional autonomy and minority language protection. Interestingly, on both these policy areas, information from other EFA regionalist parties is interpreted as a way to support

[12] As reported by interview respondents.

the ‘feasibility’ of Breton autonomy. This unified interpretation reflects the ideological unity in the UDB. However, it also reflects a factor that hinders the UDB’s learning: the feeling of falling behind. I find that this feeling hinders progress along the process of learning.

Findings in this chapter stem from ten interviews with members of the UDB. Eight of these interview respondents are members of the party’s executive board, nine have been UDB candidates, and one is an elected member. The chapter also draws on the book *S’emanciper,* articles from the UDB’s magazine *Le Peuple Breton,* and press releases from the UDB. Interviews and documents were conducted/collected and analyzed in French.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the Union Démocratique Bretonne and then a review of how the UDB performs on the five contextual factors of my theoretical framework. In section three, I unpack the UDB’s transnational interactions by mapping the UDB’s relationships in EFA. Section four explores whether the UDB displays learning by following the three stages of information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation. I also consider barriers to learning such as their lack of regional success and activist approach to transnational networking. I thus explore the tension that the UDB is both deeply committed to transnational regionalism and persistently unsuccessful in Breton regional politics. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the role of contextual factors in learning, the transnational party-political learning framework proposed in this thesis and to what extent the UDB’s experience is consistent with this theoretical proposal.

5.1 Introducing the Union Démocratique Bretonne

The Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB) is a left-wing autonomist party based in the regions of Brittany and Loire-Atlantique in France. The party’s three main aims are left wing (‘gauche’) economic policies, autonomism, and environmentalism. The UDB is not independentist but it promotes federalism,

in France and in the EU. The party's goals are influenced by what they see as the hyper-centralization of France. French centralization means that Breton regional institutions are still heavily controlled by the French state, which has a 'tentacular' nature (Cole and Laughlin, 2003: 267). This sense of regional disempowerment becomes important when the UDB tries to adapt policies from other parties.

Source: French Ministry of the Interior

Figure 5.1 Map of French administrative regions

Furthermore, the UDB is affected by the separation of Brittany into two administrative regions: Bretagne and the Pays de la Loire, which the UDB seeks to unify. Reunification was the second point of its founding charter in 1964 and remains a priority for UDB politicians (Miodownik and Cartrite, 2006: 62). The map below delineates the administrative division of the region. The second map highlights another division in the region: linguistic differences in Brittany. Alongside Breton, Brittany is also home to Gallo. These institutional and cultural factors shape the UDB.

Source: Bretagne Culture Diversite

Figure 5.2 Map of Regional Languages in Brittany

Recently, the UDB decided to no longer form coalitions with the French Socialist party. This decision reflected party members' disappointment with the Socialist Government and regional Socialist leaders (particularly regional President and then Minister for Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian). Several older

UDB members left in disagreement with this electorally autonomous approach to elections, highlighting the divisive power of Le Drian for autonomists (Pasquier, 2016: 157-159). After separating from Socialist and Green partners, in the 2015 regional elections, the UDB ran on a regionalist platform (Oui la Bretagne). The regionalist coalition won 6.7% of the vote and the UDB was unable to re-elect any members to the regional government. This recent strategic shift and the organisational rejuvenation (particularly in age) of the party provide the foundation for my discussion of party learning.

5.2 Contextual Factors and the UDB

To compare the UDB's experience of transnational political party networking and learning, I first consider how the party performs on a number of contextual factors: electoral success, governing responsibility, party centralization, key transnational entrepreneurs, and issue contention. For the UDB, the most important contextual factors are lack of electoral success, presence of numerous transnational entrepreneurs, and issue contention. The party's low levels of electoral support and strong ideological stance hinder its ability to learn. Nonetheless, the party's communicative executive, including numerous entrepreneurs, and intra-party strategic contestation mean that members of the UDB attempt and occasionally succeed at learning from EFA partners.

(1) Electoral Strength and Governing Responsibility

The UDB has low, although steady, levels of electoral strength and few positions of governing responsibility. This lack of electoral strength and governing responsibility encourages them to look for positive, more successful examples elsewhere, but it also engenders a feeling of being left behind. The UDB's support base has traditionally been very small and it has often run on varied coalition platforms. As such, it is difficult to follow the party's electoral evolution through vote shares. At the much broader level of French legislative elections (which also add on the complication of two rounds of election).

However, there has been some increase in UDB vote share over time. More importantly, the party has consistently contested elections since its foundation, although in some cases at national legislative elections they presented candidates in only some constituencies. This consistency sets them apart from other Breton regionalist parties, which have mostly been short-lived.

Table 5.1 UDB regional electoral results (1986-2015) (Pasquier, 2015)

Year	UDB Percent of Vote	Seats	Governing Responsibility
2015	6.71%*	0	-
2010	12.7%**	3	In Opposition
2004	9.70%**	4	In Opposition
1998	3.6%	0	-
1992	2.4%***	0	-
1986	1.6%****	0	-

*on regionalist 'Oui La Bretagne' list
**on Green/UDB list
***on joint Breton regionalist platform
****on list with PSU

In Breton regional elections, the UDB has consistently contested elections and received a steady, if low, vote share. Their separation from more mainstream parties' coalitions led to the loss of all three regional elected members in 2015. However, the UDB has elected two Nantes city councillors. These councillors sit in the governing coalition on the Nantes City Council, with the Socialist Party.

At the statewide level, the picture is more complicated as the UDB does not always run in each constituency and has varied agreements to support or coalesce around other parties' candidates. As such, it is difficult to show precise vote share figures for UDB performance in statewide legislative elections. However, in 2012, the first Breton autonomist, Paul Molac, was elected to the Assemblée Nationale. Molac was supported by the Parti Socialiste, Europe Écologie-Les Verts, and the UDB. Although Molac distances himself from party membership, he is closely linked to the UDB; some of his

staff are active members of the party. Molac was re-elected in 2017 on Emmanuel Macron's 'La Republique en Marche' list, although "he nevertheless maintains links with Regions et Peuples Solidaires" (*Peuple Breton,* 25 August 2017).

Despite this breakthrough for the UDB, the party remains small. A member of the party's executive explained that recruitment was a priority and that, "it is difficult to convince people to join parties and participate." The UDB nonetheless maintains a consistent presence in elections and a stable core membership.

As previously noted, in 2015, the UDB formed the 'Oui la Bretagne' electoral coalition with Christian Troadec. Troadec became well known in Brittany as mayor of Carhaix and a leader of the *bonnet rouges* movement.[13] This coalition was seen as a way to consolidate the Breton autonomist movement and a strategic choice to build the UDB's support base. The party's spokesperson explained that under Oui la Bretagne: "There are many people today who do not want to join a political party, but still want to take part in politics. With the platform 'Oui la Bretagne,' we give them the opportunity to do so." The platform is envisioned by party leadership to be in place for 'many years' beyond the 2015 regional election.

(2) Party Centralization

The UDB as an organisation displays characteristics of *structured decentralization*. The UDB has a consistent base of 500 members, 'can campaign, can present candidates all over' and 'has a form of continuity with consistent membership and a regular presence' in Brittany (Interview 14). The party eschews formal, centralized leadership. Rather than adopting a top-down approach, the UDB's organizational structure stems from its Marxist and anti-

[13] The *bonnet rouges* were a protest movement against a proposed new tax on trucks, which was seen as detrimental to the Breton agricultural industry.

colonialist roots. One staff member explained: “the specialty of the UDB I think is a party that leaves a lot of room for individual energy but in a very structured framework—very leftist” (Interview 12).

The decentralized components of the party are typified by the fact that the UDB does not have a formal role for a leader. From the early years of the party, members “sought to avoid the monopolization of power by a leader by favoring a collegiate operation” (Pasquier, 2004: 113). However, the party has a small group of elites which make it possible to identify a de facto leader and leading role. The de facto leading role in the party is its spokesperson; the position is currently held by Nil Caouissin. Caouissin explained this role:

> “Normally we decide everything communally and there is a responsible member for each internal issue. In these cases, I am just a member of the party. But, as I must speak for the party, often in front of the media…it's me who will finally report the decisions. It’s me who signs accords with our partners. And when someone wants to speak with the UDB, it’s me they call. So—I have more information than others, but I try to share it as much as possible.”

Party policy, on day to day matters, is decided by the *bureau politique* which is comprised of 28 members: 14 from each regional branch and 14 members elected at the National Congress. This includes members such as the spokesperson and members responsible for communication, training, and international affairs. The bureau meets every 6 weeks. However, on bigger issues, the party consults its members. This can occur through a vote in each territorial federation or through a convention, where each member has a vote (Interview 19). Information transmission across these structures is aided by the party’s communication wing which is underpinned by the monthly magazine *Le Peuple Breton*. This magazine disseminates information between members (about half of *Peuple Breton* subscribers are UDB members). Notably, the magazine has a permanent international section.

Organisationally, the party's strategic shift catalysed a renewal in the party which has led to a younger membership and executive. One member of the executive bureau explained: "We have a direction which is completely rejuvenated. And consequently, we leave room for new initiatives" (Interview 14). Another executive member explained that a new young cohort, "brought new life into the UDB with the support and help of older members" (Interview 19). The level of centralization within a party affects the extent to which information acquired from other parties can be shifted from individual to collective understanding. Although the UDB has a decentralized Marxist ethos, the small size of the party, close relationships within the elite cohort, and the younger core of the party contribute to clear communication across the party. Decentralization does thus not lead to significant divergent views across the party.

(3) Key Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs maintain connections and bridge the gap between the regional party and EFA. In a small party with few resources, active entrepreneurs are particularly important. One long time UDB member and active member of EFA explained that it is often difficult to talk about official 'relationships' between parties, "because we are small and so we have contacts that are like friendships" (Interview 21). The UDB has several very invested entrepreneurs who play a central role in both the UDB and EFA.

Earlier in his career, *Le Peuple Breton*'s editor and the UDB's head of communications, Gael Briand, served as a European Free Alliance intern. The magazine is now affiliated with EFA's political foundation, the Centre Maurits Coppetiers (CMC). This relationship with the CMC encourages more points of contact between the UDB and EFA. For example, membership of the CMC means that the UDB can send not only a UDB delegate to the EFA General

Assembly but a delegate to the CMC General Assembly (held parallel to the EFA GA).

The UDB also has a dedicated international officer (Victor Gallou) and the UDB Jeunes, the party's youth branch, has its own international officer (Jean-Christophe Cordaillat). Both regularly attend EFA events. Gallou explained that the role entails "managing relations with EFA parties and the promotion or political development of the UDB in Europe and internationally."

Earlier on in EFA's history, Corsican MEP Max Siemoni strengthened the relationship between EFA and French EFA member parties. Simeoni was the first French regionalist MEP, elected in 1989. During his tenure in the European Parliament, his staff included UDB spokesperson Christian Guyonvarc'h. One UDB member explained: "Christian Guyonvarc'h, who is a UDB official, was a parliamentary assistant in Europe for years. So, there is a UDB official in the European parliamentary system. We actively participate in the system" (Interview 16).

(4) Issue Contestation

Issue contestation can lead to a greater effort to develop policies within a party and to strengthen the arguments by different factions within a party. Alternately, policy agreement might lead parties to emphasize certain policy areas in their communications transnationally. Learning is commenced by a transfer of information, often initiated by a *policy seeking*. Issue contestation might affect how likely a party is to seek new information on specific policy areas and which policy or strategy issues it is likely to learn on.

The core values of the UDB are autonomism (both a defense of Breton culture and a call for greater regional autonomy) and left-wing social and economic stances. The UDB's position has shifted over time towards a more moderate left-wing position. One long-standing member of the party explained that previously the party had "a rigidity, based in the Marxist-Leninist culture. And

it's true that the line of the party was a bit rigid. The left-wing values are still there…you can't forget that the UDB supports the liberation fights of all peoples. So, that has stayed the same in the UDB. These are stable and reassuring values" (Interview 16).

Left-wing economic and social positions also underpin the party's position on Europe. A common refrain from interview respondents on the European Union was to call for a 'social Europe' and a 'political Europe' and to argue against the 'hyper-liberal' nature of the EU. Although the party's members avow pro-European stances and identities, there is a tension at the heart of this stance. One young, more Eurosceptic member explained: "So we have to choose: to support liberal politics or to push for change in Europe—but at the risk of destroying Europe?" (Interview 18).

The party's other area of focus is language. The UDB emphasizes the importance of minority languages (Breton and Gallo) and Breton culture. While "the defense of the language remains essential and dominant," I would argue that it was less salient than in the FNP (Interview 16). The first reason for this is that Brittany has two main languages. One youth member noted that: "we always talk about Breton, but we forget about Gallo, which is also a language of Brittany" (Interview 15). Second, the Breton cultural movement does not have explicit political links (Interview 16). Finally, language policy is not perceived to lead to success. A member of the UDB executive explained: "[The Breton language] is important for many people in the UDB but in the political discourse we don't put it first. Because we are caricatured" (Interview 19).

There is a strong sense of ideological agreement within the UDB. One interview respondent explained: "For me ideology is hyper-important. After, however, we must also know that there is ideology on one side and after arriving in power on the other…we're on the fence: between the political system which obliges us to make alliances to be elected and our ideology which encourages us to

work autonomously" (Interview 21). This juggling of autonomist values and strategy has also led to a recent, contested change in the party's electoral behaviour.

In 2014, the UDB chose to contest elections autonomously, separating themselves from shared lists with the Socialist Party and the Green Party. The link between the UDB and Socialists was well established, but controversial. One party member explained, "Those who hate us said we are the dogs of the Socialist Party." After the election of Socialist President Francois Hollande, UDB members were disappointed with the Socialist French Government and regional Socialist leaders (particularly President of the Breton region and Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian). They also felt that the regionalist agenda was being co-opted by mainstream parties who adopt a regionalist rhetoric in Brittany (Cole and Laughlin, 2010: 268).

In 2014, Caouissin unseated incumbent leader Mona Bras and was elected at the age of 23 to the spokesperson role. Some members were upset with the change; a staff member explained that, after the change, "a lot of our members, often the older ones, quit the party" (Interview 12). In section four of this chapter, I will further elaborate on how elites learned in order to support their positions in this strategic debate.

5.3 Transnational Interactions

The root of my proposed party learning framework is the sustained interactions between EFA's member parties. This section allows me to map the UDB's relationships within the European Free Alliance. These are developed through interactions at EFA events, bilateral personal contacts, and information-seeking outreach by the UDB's transnationally active elite members. The UDB joined EFA in 1986 and eight years later co-founded what was described as the 'EFA in France' *Regions et Peuples Solidaires*, which links French

regionalist parties to one another. The UDB's history of international relations predates their membership of EFA:

> "Even in a way in the 70s, we had relations with the Irish, the Kanaks, the Martinicans ... International affairs, for us in Brittany, has always enormously counted. Because as a peripheral nation we have also needed relationships and support from elsewhere…This has always been a very important aspect: solidarity internationally, between peoples" (Interview 14).

International solidarity reflects both the anti-colonialism of the UDB and the party's peripheral nature in France. The party's policy book explained: "International solidarity has nothing to do with charity, but first requires a review of the rules of the global economy" (*S'emanciper*, 2018: 163). In Europe, the UDB particularly aligns itself with parties it sees as having a Celtic tradition. One respondent explained: "there is an open-mindedness and a desire for mutual aid between Brittany and Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and on the Atlantic Arc…There is a willingness to share" (Interview 18).

The network visualization of the UDB's connections provides an overview of UDB elites' relationships in the EFA network. There are a high number of connected interview respondents in the UDB. Six of the ten respondents name more than seven parties. The graph notably shows one respondent with no connections. That respondent believed that international connections were better discussed by those in 'international affairs' roles. This shows the power of the 'entrepreneur' in the EFA network. They are the conduit to connections for less internationally active party members. The graph also shows which EFA parties were named by most respondents: Plaid Cymru, the SNP, ERC, Eusko Alkartasuna (from the Basque Country) and the PNC from Corsica. These connections will be discussed in the rest of this section.

(1) Key Partners

Most UDB members interviewed named the Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, as its closest ally. Plaid's ideologies and culture are seen to align with

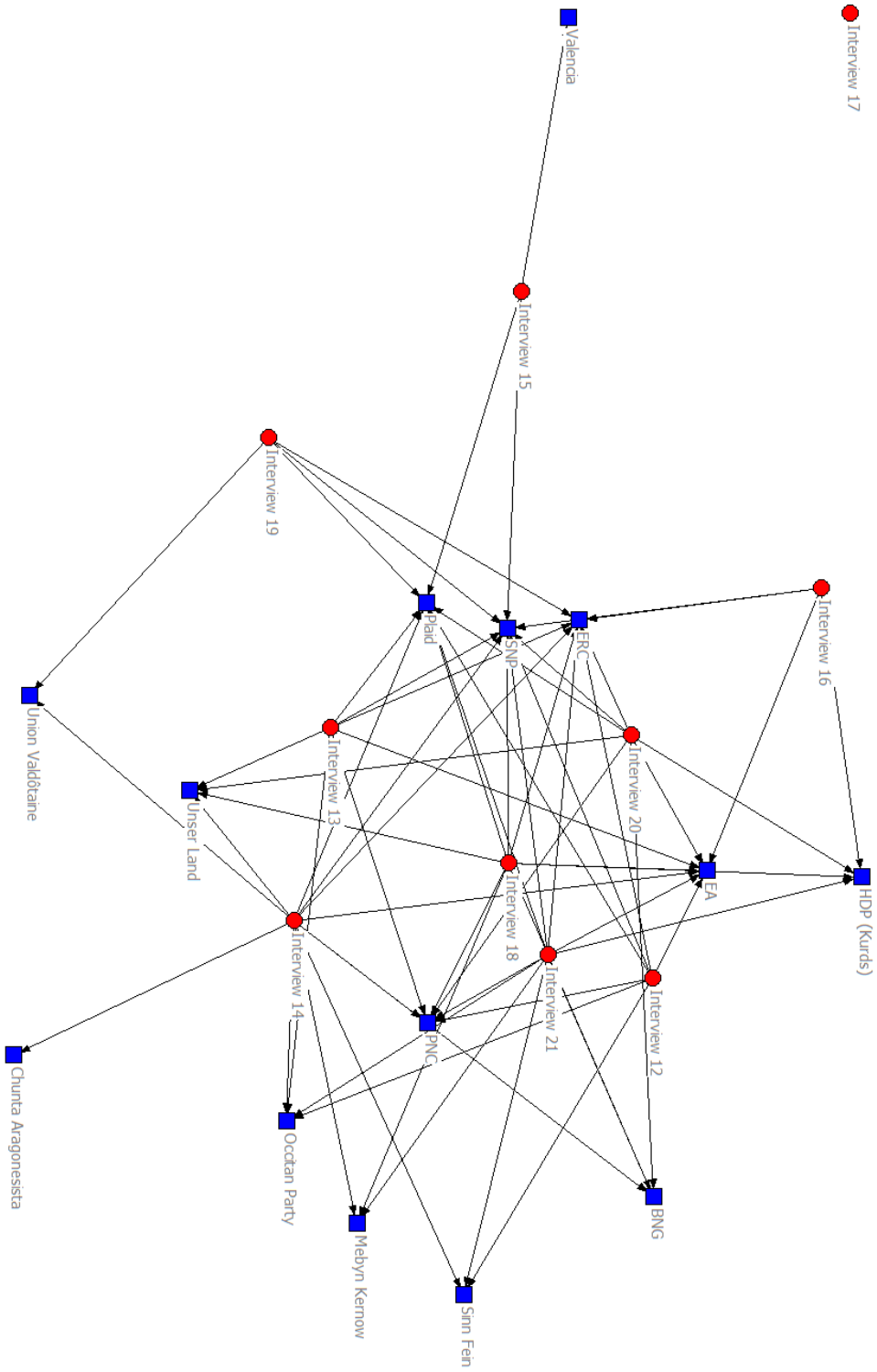
Breton culture and UDB ideologies. One elected member explained: “For us, starting from history and culture, we end up with natural allies such as Wales or other Celtic countries…The Corsicans, they have more relations with Sardinia or with Catalonia because they are natural allies in terms of culture and language” (Interview 13).

UDB members consider Plaid’s autonomist, but not fully independentist, stance as more relatable to Brittany. Furthermore, “what is interesting with Wales is that there have always been strong historical links between Brittany and Wales, because the languages are really similar…Wales and Brittany are kind of the same size, the same population, thus we can concretely compare ourselves to them” (Interview 12). This sense of comparability becomes important when exchanging information and going through the learning process because it eases the burden on UDB members to adapt information to the Breton context.

The relationship to Plaid is seen as much stronger than the relationship to other EFA parties. One member explained, “Even if we have amicable, respectful relations with the SNP, there aren’t the same intensive ties that we have with Plaid” (Interview 18). Before membership of EFA, in 1974 the UDB signed the *Chartre de Brest* with ‘likeminded’ movements across Europe including: Welsh, Galician, Irish, Catalan, Sardinian, and Basque movements (Schrijver, 2006: 212). The uniting factor for these parties was the *dual* goals of autonomism and socialism.

A member of the party’s executive explained that the UDB “also have fairly close relations with the BNG of Galicia, and with ERC de Catalonia because they are two leftist parties. We have historical relations with them” (Interview 20). Further, the UDB saw its network as stretching between parties on the Iberic Peninsula and the British Isles. With the former, ideological congruence drove relationships. With the latter both ideology and a Celtic culture were seen to be aligned.

Figure 5.3 SNA Visualization of UDB Transnational Relationships



A key figure in the UDB's transnational relationships explained that Mebyn Kernow, the Cornish nationalist party, is a party with which the UDB is 'very, very close' (Interview 14). The relationship is enhanced by a power differential. The respondent explained: "it's easier to work with the Cornish because they respond to us when we communicate with them immediately. The issue is that as we are weaker than the Welsh and Scots. So, the Welsh and Scots come because of kindness but they are not necessarily demanding to come to Brittany" (Interview 14). However, the small size also has a disadvantage. One internationally active member explained that "with Mebyn Kernow, there's not enough exchange because they are so small that there is no time for them to organise things" (Interview 21).

On the contrary, while relationships with MK are encouraged through a power differential, they are hindered with the SNP. The UDB relates to the SNP, both as one of its Celtic cultural sister parties, and ideologically. However, there are "very few relations with Scotland, even if we would like that there were more" (Interview 12). One respondent explained, that with Brexit: "The SNP is especially focused on itself right now. It's an internal fight this moment…For our general meeting in March, we sent invitations to the SNP and Plaid. For the moment only have the Plaid answered. The SNP is currently occupied" (Interview 18). One internationally active member noted that "with the Scots, the issue is that we have trouble contacting them because, well of course, the Scots can talk to states" (Interview 14)

The UDB's sub-network is shaped by its leftist ideological and Celtic cultural positionality. However, power also shapes the level of interactions within the European Free Alliance. Within the UDB's sub-network, the party finds itself in the middle: "That's really the thing: the Cornish want to be like the Bretons, the Bretons want to be like the Welsh, and the Welsh want to be like the Scots" (Interview 14).

(2) Regions et Peuples Solidaires

In addition to looking at the UDB's network in the European Free Alliance, it is important to mention its network within the French state. The UDB cofounded *Regions et Peuples Solidaires (RPS),* a network bringing together French nationalist and regionalist parties. RPS is not an electoral or legislative coalition. Rather, it is a broader collaborative institution, like the European Free Alliance.

RPS members meet every year in a 'summer school' which rotates across the French regionalists' territories. At this summer school, the RPS parties come together "to create a network of knowledge, to see how the other parties campaign, how active they are." EFA partners and staff are also often in attendance. One of the party's executive members explained: "in general, [RPS] has served me in an indirect way. That is, it's not an argument that is very effective in convincing Breton people. But on the other hand, to see how the other parties organise themselves and campaign effectively has often helped me" (Interview 20). Within RPS, relationships that were emphasized were those with the Occitan Party, the Alsacian Unser Land party, and the Corsican *U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa* (PNC).

The UDB sees itself as a leader in the RPS network. Members of the UDB explained, that while Corsica has regional power currently, the UDB represents a much larger population and is more transnationally active than the Corsican parties. Corsica is considered slightly 'insular' and, due to its island nature, 'particular.' One UDB staff member explained:

> "By our partners in France, we are regarded as the big party. On the other hand, at the European level, it's the opposite. We are one of the smallest regionalist parties at European level. We are a little in the middle. That is to say, at the French level, other partners are expecting a lot from us. While at the European level, nobody is expecting anything from us" (Interview 12).

The UDB straddles the line between acting as a powerful actor in its French network, and being at a European level, seen as electorally weak. Intra-state relationships between nationalist and regionalist parties are not the focus of this thesis, but networks such as RPS relationships between nationalist and regionalist parties. These provide useful case studies for further applications of the party learning framework.

(3) Boundaries

Just as ideology brings the UDB closer to some parties, it also distances them from other partners. This includes particularly right wing parties, particularly in Italy (Interview 14). There is also a boundary also between Western and Eastern Europe. The lack of relationships with Eastern European countries is because, “they are more conservative parties—not always, but often. And then, they are further away. So, we are in solidarity, but we communicate less often” (Interview 20).

A more complex case is Sinn Fein. One UDB executive member active in EFA explained: “I do not have a relationship with them today because I have almost never seen them. Because they are not in EFA” (Interview 14). Given the UDB’s limited resources, the European Free Alliance events thus offer a main and dominant space for interactions. Despite willingness to speak to Sinn Fein, Sinn Fein’s absence from these events reduces the likelihood of UDB engagement. Furthermore, another executive member suggested: “the SNP don't want EFA to have relationships with the Irish party because of the history” (Interview 21). The SNP’s power and the UDB’s desire to relate to them thus also play a factor in their distance from this specific Celtic, left-wing party.

Beyond the patterns of relationships between parties, this thesis seeks to understand the content, the substance, of transnational party networking. What information passes between parties in the EFA network? Do parties learn from one another? When members travel between regions, they travel “to see how

it goes elsewhere, to meet the parties, how do the other parties to implement their policies and even how they gather the people, how they manage to gather members" (Interview 19). The next section seeks more detail on how this process of interaction and information seeking progresses.

5.4 Learning in the Union Démocratique Bretonne

This thesis is built on the idea that regular transnational interaction has been facilitated by the European Free Alliance. These interactions, I argue, are likely to have some consequential exchange of information. This can thus trigger a process of learning. I theorized that the process would then proceed in three stages: information acquisition, interpretation, and implementation. One UDB member explained that their transnational interactions were a way of gathering information: "In the UDB I think we all have an interest in looking at what is happening in the other regionalist and nationalist parties in Europe to see - how are they succeeding? How are they advancing? How can we make our movement progress?" (Interview 13).

I follow the three stages of learning to consider whether the UDB has learned from their transnational inquiries. In the case of the UDB, I find four cases of information processing and learning on: campaign techniques, electoral strategy, minority language protection, and autonomism. The latter two policy areas are interpreted using a similar 'feasibility' frame, using EFA partners' information to normalize autonomism. As such, these four policy areas engender three cases of learning which vary in their level of depth and complexity.

(1) Information Acquisition

Information acquisition is crucial to the learning process, because learning requires change in belief or behaviour *based on some new experience or information*. This stage has also been called 'scanning' in which individuals monitor their environment and collect data (Daft and Weick, 1984: 286).

Although not as mechanical as this description suggests, UDB elites do collect new information from EFA partners. This has particularly occurred on four policy areas: campaigning, electoral strategy, regional autonomy and language policy. Most of these experiences include some 'in person' contact. This suggests that travel particularly contributes to cross-party information exchange. There are also instances in which the UDB fails to acquire information from EFA partners. A main barrier to information acquisition, I argue, is the party's strict ideological limits.

Campaigning and Electoral Strategy

One notable instance of UDB members travelling was when, through funding from EFA, five UDB members travelled to Scotland for a workshop run by SNP Youth on campaigning. Another UDB Jeunes member also travelled to Wales for the Brexit vote. Both weekends were oriented towards learning to campaign. One attendee of the Glasgow event explained: "Why were we in Glasgow? To learn the techniques of activism. How could the SNP evolve and ultimately gain power? They taught us the basis of the technique…it's more than just political or symbolic. It's really about helping each other in a concrete way" (Interview 15).

Another attendee and member of the executive bureau explained that participants learned 'how to impart a positive political message and interest people,' a 'scientific manner' of campaigning, and 'methods of organisation.' They emphasized: "we were not there just to listen but also to get a feel for how to campaign" (Interview 19). In this case, the information acquired was very specific and practical. One member of the UDB, for example, noted their interest in how the SNP activists took selfies in the street while campaigning (Interview 14).

At a more strategic level, the UDB decided, after much debate, to run more autonomously in elections. Elite party members noted a lot of evidence of other

EFA member parties who campaigned more autonomously. One referred to the 'wonderful' way the SNP broke their link with London, developing their own project in a Scottish rather than British context (Interview 21). Recalling conversations with Basque and Galician partners, a prominent UDB member explained:

> "I saw places that had been successful, they presented themselves whether alone or in coalition, but in any case, in their own right. And it was important for me to realize that we were indeed ... maybe it's not true but I had the impression that we are kind of the only ones in Europe to try to have autonomy thanks to a French party. And it did not work." (Interview 20).

Involvement in the EFA network allowed UDB elites to acquire relevant information. Other parties' success drove information acquisition, reinforcing the role of differential electoral success in the learning process. The member reinforces this dynamic, explaining:

> "Another thing I have seen in international contacts is the importance of coalitions. For example, in the North Basque Country, the party in the French state, they began to really progress with the electorate when they managed to reunite their different politicians who were very opposed to one another. When they managed to meet and progress in Corsica for example, they won the elections" (Interview 20).

The same narrative of seeking information about more successful parties can be seen in the UDB's youth wing. The *UDB Jeunes* spokesperson explained that the youth party was entering a debate: "We are going to decide there how we will evolve the UDB Jeunes. Should we autonomise more? To attract more young people? A little bit like in Galicia, where there is Galicia Nova." Strategic debates are spurred on by elite observations of different strategic and organisational choices elsewhere.

Language policy

Information gathering from EFA partners on language policy is much more technocratic than that on campaigning. This is driven specifically through

institutional access. Pierre-Emmanuel Marais, a councillor at the Nantes City Council, holds “the function of delegate for linguistic, educational and cultural diversity and actions around schools.” Through this position, Marais and his staff member were able to visit Cardiff as part of the Nantes/Cardiff ‘town twinning’ project. The visit “was part of a municipal objective, but we were, at the same time able to meet Plaid Cymru activists and the President of Plaid Cymru Ifanc (Youth).” Through these links, the party seeks further information about Plaid success. Marais explained:

> “We work within the framework of my delegation: linguistic diversity. It interests me what happened in Wales in terms of Welsh language development. After, of course, it’s strategic. We met the youth president of Plaid Cymru, and they have 700 members in Plaid Cymru. That’s the equivalent of our forces in Brittany. We were surprised, and we considered it with interest—how did they do it? The question of the existence of the Welsh nation, Welsh culture, Welsh language: all these can be transposed in Brittany.”

Marais also used his position in the city council to study other examples of language policy through a visit to Brussels and a visit to Ireland. The *Peuple Breton* reported on his trip: “At the crossroads of social and economic fields, the inhabitants of Brussels have invented modern linguistic tools. This is an example that Pierre-Emmanuel Marais hopes to highlight as part of his delegation on linguistic diversity in Nantes, particularly concerning the development of Breton” (Le Peuple Breton, 16 June 2017). Another UDB member noted that he had visited Friesland, “but it was not for EFA. It was for Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), an association that speaks about languages” (Interview 21). Breton exchange on language is facilitated through non-party institutional links.

The use of technocratic routes to seek policy solutions on minority language policy reflects the institutionalization of this policy area at an EU level. “Supranational organizations have been central to developments in international law facilitating the greater recognition of promotion-oriented

language rights for minorities" (May, 2013: 246). Minority language protection has become framed in terms of legal 'rights.' As such, the UDB is able to use non-political party routes to learn about language policy. However, while the *method* of information acquisition is more technocratic, the interpretation of information from these trips seems political. Marais explained: "We have some perspective on questions of language, with Breton language schools, but as far as the political point of view, we have a lot to learn."

Regional autonomy policy

The party has sought information about the autonomous legislatures, of the UK and Germany particularly. In the late 1990s, the UDB was inspired by the devolution referendums in Scotland and Wales. The party began to write a document calling for a special statute of autonomy for Brittany in 1998 and finally adopted it in May 1999 (contemporaneously to the first elections for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly).

In 2018, one member of the executive board explained that the UDB still "demand a statute of autonomy like the one that exists already in Scotland or Wales. We also take the example of the German Lander" (Interview 20). In the 2018 restatement of the UDB's policy (*S'emanciper*), the party cites the 1999 brochure. For the last 20 years, information about autonomist settlements in the UK and Germany have been used as a reference point to explain the autonomist demands.

Barriers to acquisition

Although there are points of information acquisition in the UDB, there are also barriers to UDB members receiving information from their relationships. The UDB view their engagement in EFA as not only about receiving information, but also about transmitting it. For example, the UDB limits the number of parties it will engage with within EFA. While, "the UDB does not demand that all are left parties. We will demand that the parties are progressive, that they are open

to others. This is our minimum requirement" (Interview 18). Members set strict boundaries to who they will engage with. For example, the party was one of three moved to suspend the Partito Sardu d'Azione (a Sardinian regionalist party) and Pro Lombardia Independenzia (a Lombardian regionalist party). Three French regionalist parties (UDB, Partitu di a Nazione Corsa, Partit Occitan) called on EFA at the 2018 General Assembly to suspend these parties for their cooperation with the far right La Lega in recent Italian elections.

One of the proponents argued at the General Assembly: "If you hid behind traditions and culture, then you can excuse anything…individuality only has value if there are values and principles above that." For the UDB then, information acquisition explicitly occurs within its existing sub-network, which is framed around its ideological stances.

(2) Information Interpretation

Information interpretation is the incorporation of new information into the existing context of an individual or organisation. Interpretation allows the new information to be adapted into existing knowledge, it is a 'process of sensemaking.' In this sensemaking, "organizational actors have first to make sense of what is happening in their organizational environments, in order to develop a shared interpretation that can serve as a context for organizational action" (Choo, 1996: 332). As seen in the FNP, individuals in a political party may not have the same interpretation of information, which can hinder collective learning. In the case of the UDB, ideological agreement underpins party elites' agreement on interpretations of transnational information.

There is a particularly an interesting convergence of interpretations on information about other regions' language and autonomy statutes. UDB members use this information to underpin the feasibility of Breton autonomism. This interpretation further allows the UDB to *justify* their existing policy of autonomism, rather than changing the policy choice itself. I also consider a

barrier to further information interpretation, the organisational culture in the UDB of 'feeling left behind.' This feeling drives the need to learn but it also allows members to fully question whether information is applicable to the Breton case.

Campaigning and Electoral Strategy

The interpretation from those who attended the Glasgow campaigning training event focused on the 'scientific' nature of the SNP's campaign. In canvassing with the SNP, one attendee explained:

> "Everything is calculated. We did not miss any door. We knew how to talk to people, we defined everything, and we learned a lot about how to talk to people, how to get the message across…there in the scientific aspect we really learned a lot...We really need to plead our case here in Brittany because we have three elections coming up: presidential, legislative, senatorial" (Interview 14).

Another explained that, while Brittany was not Scotland, "on the level of everything that is technical and practical, you can still organise things a little bit like they do in Scotland" (Interview 19). This suggests that, when information is acquired in a technical and specific manner, information can be more easily interpreted. In this sense, the UDB echoes the SNP's interpretation of itself as a party able to campaign in a modern way, using their Activate/NationBuilder database. UDB members saw the SNP's technical choices as not regionally specific, but rather about party organisational skills, and thus adaptable to Breton campaigning.

While the interpretation of the SNP's campaigning lessons was eased by its technocratic nature, the strategic choices that faced the UDB were more complex. As explained previously, the faction of the party that sought to run in elections more autonomously ultimately won the debate. To do so, elites on this side of the debate drew on examples from other countries. For example, one noted that the electoral coalitions in Corsica and the Basque Country were:

> “an inspiration to build ‘Oui la Bretagne. It's also an argument to convince others in the UDB because when I talk about Scotland, Wales, for example, they say: ‘But it's not it's not the French state so it's not the same situation, you cannot compare.’ But Corsica or the Basque Country, that's the French state too and yet they managed anyway. So that means it's possible” (Interview 20).

This quote is revealing of the process of interpretation. While the respondent had a wide range of information, the interpretive process helped them find the information that was most *adaptable.*

Furthermore, this respondent quite clearly takes part in moving their learning from an individual choice to a collective one. They sought ‘to convince others in the UDB.’ Another member of the UDB executive board remembered the debates around the UDB’s strategy and noted: “it took a long time, working to show that it is better to spend time building our strategy for ourselves” (Interview 19). Intra-party contestation on strategy thus led elite party members to seek supporting evidence from the EFA network. Interpretative processes also led elites to consider how to collectivize their learning and lessons from other EFA partners were adopted to convince party members about a strategic decision.

Regional autonomy and language protection policy

Using Scottish, Welsh and German examples of autonomy has been the practice in the UDB since the late 1990’s. But what is the party’s interpretation of these examples? The overarching interpretation within the UDB is that these cases give the UDB’s plans for autonomy a sense of feasibility and legitimacy. An exchange between two interview respondents helps to illustrate this. Speaking of the value of transnational relationships, one interview respondent explains:

> “And above all it gives us weapons to say - you say it's not possible in France – look: it's better than at home and you say it's not possible” (Interview 15).
> “That's a great argument” (Interview 16).

> “It's a great argument, but it’s not working.”
> “Just wait, it will catch on.”

This exchange illustrates how UDB members point at transnational examples of devolution processes and use these processes to demonstrate the benefits and feasibility of autonomy. The feasibility interpretation is longstanding in the UDB. For example, the 1999 *Statut politique pour la Bretagne* explicitly modelled its demands on the Welsh Assembly. In 2008 the UDB sent a delegate to the SNP conference and concluded: “The UDB is pleased to have as a partner a party like the SNP, which proves that the political autonomy of a people is credible and necessary at the time of Europe” (UDB press release, 21/10/08).

In 2014, after the Scottish independence referendum, the spokesperson/de facto leader of the UDB at the time Mona Bras wrote, “The Scottish example should lead France to question itself.” The feasibility framing is a recognized pattern in lesson-drawing. Richard Rose wrote: “The emphasis that policymakers place upon the lessons of experience reflects their concern with feasibility. Is a proposed course of action capable of being carried out, and if so, will it produce the predicted result?” (1991: 5).

Interpretation allows individuals to adapt information to their regional situation. For UDB activists, a prescient issue is that “in Brittany, many people are scared of the idea of independence and so the example of Germany reassures them. There are autonomous regions that are not demanding independence. It’s an example that allows us to calm people generally” (Interview 20). International examples help to ‘normalize’ autonomist ideas and are used as *supporting argumentation* for existing UDB autonomism. In Brittany, “when we talk about our linguistic policies, it doesn’t really interest people. But when we say that there is the same thing in Wales or Catalonia, suddenly it’s wonderful. Thus, we try also to play on this international side of things” (Interview 13).

As this quote suggests, the feasibility framing extends to both autonomy and language policy. In Pierre-Emmanuel Marais's report on Breton language street signs he argued: "The Breton language offers a chance to demarcate and reinforce Nantes's attractiveness against other European metropoles, like Barcelona and Edinburgh have done."[14] Nantes, he argues, is also a regional capital. Marais argued that bilingualism should be legislated for at the Breton Assembly: "We can do it. Today, it's not a question for us, but for France. And in Europe, there are many languages—bilingualism is the norm" (Interview 13).

The UDB sees the SNP as "a big inspiration because for them it's totally normal to go towards autonomy. In France, it's hard. It's a rather marginal idea" (Interview 18). More advanced regionalist and nationalist parties inspire the UDB and the UDB sees caricatures of autonomism's peripherality as a barrier to its success. As such, information and arguments drawn from other EFA parties are mobilized to emphasize the feasibility of autonomist policies.

Barriers to Interpretation

Information interpretation requires the adaptation of information from transnational partners to the local context. Throughout the interviews, respondents often lamented that information from other parties did not seem to apply to the UDB. This common refrain was based on the feeling that the UDB was too 'behind' to fully adapt information from EFA partners. Other parties' electoral success incentivizes parties to learn about them but *too much* of a difference can hinder information interpretation. This balance of perceived 'achievable' success is one reason that the relationship between the UDB and Plaid Cymru is more valuable to UDB members than that with the SNP.

I previously touched on the tension between the UDB's transnational activism and their domestic lack of success. One elected member explained: "We are

[14] Report shared with author by Marais.

part of EFA. We try of course to meet one another regularly and to change after. But the difficulty is that we are not at the level of Welsh or Scots for example, or even the Catalans" (Interview 13). There was not only a sense that the UDB was behind, but also an understanding that it had been for a while.

When asked whether the party had changed, one staff member explained: "We have obtained very few things…The base demands are still there, since we haven't advanced a lot" (Interview 12). Members were prepared for a long journey ahead. While "self-determination is more or less pushed by many European peoples - Catalans, Basques, the Scots who today have their parliament. We are still years away, we are still far from all that" (Interview 16).

This difference in power made the UDB more reluctant to believe they were able to adapt policies from more powerful parties. One member of the executive board explained:

> "I went to Scotland a few weeks ago and they have a lot of elected people, ministers and deputies. And they have power, so they can make it happen. Here we don't have this. It's very difficult to make things work as we want because we don't have many elected people, we don't have a good place in the media" (Interview 19).

The SNP is regularly seen as too advanced for the UDB to learn from. For example, one UDB member admired the SNP's positive campaigning and argued that the UDB should adopt this strategy. However, he added: "Well I don't really know if we will succeed, because we are really little, and the elections are not for us" (Interview 21). Another member, who noted that his main goal was to increase the UDB's membership, noted: "In France, in general there are few people in political parties. I learned that it's a real difference with what you can find in Wales, Scotland, or England where I have the impression that people engage more easily. Here it's difficult to get people to join parties" (Interview 20). In each of these cases, members were seeking to engage with their understanding of the SNP's policies and success and to adapt it to the

UDB—to interpret it to their context. However, in each case, interpretation was hindered by a feeling of inadequacy, of being ‘behind’ in the EFA network.

The differences in electoral success also hinder communication from the UDB to other parties. For example, when speaking to the SNP and Plaid Cymru:

> “For them it’s evident to demand independence. I noticed that sometimes it is difficult to make them understand that we are not there. We ask for autonomy to have some means to make decisions, to put in place a good policy in Brittany. It is a difference that is quite notable” (Interview 19).

Brittany, another respondent explained, does not even have the national recognition of Catalonia or Scotland. In France, “we do not have the Breton language and Gallo language as a public language nor the existence of Breton identity. That's what really sets us apart from other brothers-in-arms, brother-nations...because here we are really, we are behind” (Interview 18). The feeling of falling behind hinders communication with more successful parties and reduces the adaptability of information received.

However, the feeling of falling behind also helps drive the UDB’s efforts to be close to Plaid Cymru, which is seen as an ‘inspiration’ but one which is not too powerful. Plaid is seen as a “truly a brother party that began very low like the UDB. Today they have improved a lot…We are close in our efforts” (Interview 18). Another echoed this: “We look a lot at the Welsh, Plaid Cymru. They were in the same situation as us at one moment” (Interview 13). As such, in the UDB, “our model, that we follow a little, is the example of Wales. Because Scotland—we are not there yet. We don’t have sufficient identity in Brittany for people to confront the French state” (Interview 14).

For the UDB, Plaid Cymru is a useful partner because the information received has a relatable quality. For example, one youth member explained: “Plaid Ifanc (Youth) also started two three people who arrived and are now having about fifty activists. We can do the same thing” (Interview 18). For information

acquisition to progress to a party-wide interpretation it must not only be seen as useful or indicative of success, but also considered *comparable*. This comparability, whether it be within the French state or at a similar level of success, allows the UDB to mobilize transnational narratives within Breton policy/political narratives.

(3) Information Implementation

Information implementation in this thesis was defined as a change, either in belief or behaviour, stemming from the acquired information. The UDB has implemented three lessons: campaigning techniques from the SNP, a feasibility framing to its autonomist policies, and other regions' examples of electorally autonomous behaviour. These three cases show three different types of implementation. In the first case, individuals who learned directly from the SNP implement their lessons by sharing information across the party, shifting individual to more collective behavioural change. In the second case, information from EFA partners' affects policy arguments rather than choices. Finally, in the case of strategy, I will discuss how learning from EFA partners was one of multiple causes that *contributed* to elite commitment to an autonomous electoral strategy.

Campaigning

The Glasgow event, although a small case of EFA interactions and subsequent learning, is a useful case. It highlights how EFA can facilitate specific meetings between political parties and activists and the work that is done *between* parties to teach and learn skills. In this case, SNP Youth led the event and training. As noted, UDB participants noted the 'scientific' nature of the campaigning techniques learned. One respondent noted that they planned to "do trainings for UDB members on what we learned. For example, on how to organise a campaign, to function as a party, on how to plan with quite rigorous methods" (Interview 19). One of the attendees was Trefina Kerrain, who is in charge of

education and training in the UDB. The direct correlation between what was learned in the EFA network and Kerrain's role in the UDB shows how having EFA entrepreneurs that are also central to the political party facilitates learning.

Electoral strategy

On electoral strategy, the UDB's spokesperson explained how EFA partners directly influenced his decision. He explained:

> "On the strategy for example, at one time I was very hesitant. Is it necessary to change the strategy? It was hard to make the choice. And many members of the other parties—either in Regions and Peoples Solidarity, or EFA—for example Basque or Galicians told me: "but you must do that, you must present yourself. Otherwise you will disappear."

In this case, the respondent provides an account of the way that EFA partners influenced him as an individual. However, the individual change in beliefs of multiple UDB elites led to a change in the party collectively. Caouissin was a prominent proponent of the change to a more autonomous electoral strategy. His election to spokesperson signified wider membership support for changing the UDB's electoral strategy.

The relationship to other parties in the European Free Alliance encouraged the UDB to move towards autonomous electoral strategies. I return to a quote used before, from a member of the UDB executive board: "I saw places that had been successful, they presented themselves whether alone or in coalition, but in any case, in their own right…seeing others elsewhere makes me think about another way to campaign" (Interview 20). When we consider this final phrase, it closely fits our original definition of learning. Organisational learning was previously defined as "if, through its processing of information, the range of [an organisation's] potential behaviours is changed" (Huber, 1991: 89). By observing EFA partners strategic choices and discussing these strategies directly with partners, UDB elites observed and found support for a new potential behaviour: a more autonomous electoral strategy. This learning had

behavioural outcomes, with the ‘Oui la Bretagne’ alliance replacing the UDB’s links with the Socialist Party.

It is important to note that transnational party learning was just one of multiple causes of this change. The choice to move away from the PS was instigated by disappointment in Francois Hollande and his territorial reform. It also reflects a ‘renewal’ of the UDB, with a younger membership and the need to recruit more members. This case highlights that party learning in the TNP network is also part of a pattern of multiple causation. While learning explains some part of policy or strategy decisions made by party elites and adopted collectively by parties, every party policy decision has numerous determinants.

Regional autonomy and language policy

The feasibility framing of autonomy policies (supporting more devolution and language protection) has developed over time using transnational examples as support. This framing focuses on autonomy being ‘the norm,’ it provides a narrative around an agreed goal of the UDB. This is implemented in the UDB’s most recent policy document, *S’émanciper.* For example:

> “In relation to all of Europe, numerous examples prove that autonomy is positive. It permitted the southern Basque Country to assure its economic development; it participates in the democratic and territorial equilibrium in Germany; it allows Scotland to promote its public services, social justice and renewable energy policies despite an unfavorable context of British austerity politics” (2018, 171).

The same section reinforces the 1999 UDB statute which demands a Breton model follow the example of Wales and Scotland. The section, which proposes in more detail the Breton Assembly, notes that the Assembly will have both regional and constituency representatives, “as has been the case for twenty years in Scotland and Wales” (*S’emanciper,* 2018: 140).

In a recent speech about the book, Gael Briand noted that “the UDB has always had a civic vision. It is this civic vision that allowed the Scots to broaden their

electoral base, it is this civic vision that allowed Gilles Simeoni, in Corsica, to win the last elections." Examples of other nationalist and regionalist parties draws on the framing of feasibility and normality. This, and other uses of the Scottish example, show that the UDB is a normal political party and that autonomy is part of an internationally accepted and broader movement (internationally and ideologically).

Like in the FNP, policy areas of learning for the UDB span both core and contested values. Two key patterns of learning have emerged both in this chapter and the last which center on the contextual factor of issue contestation. The first pattern of learning, on agreed policies, uses EFA partners to provide arguments and evidence to support an existing policy. The second, learning about contested policies, is driven by individuals seeking evidence and support for their point of view. These are then mobilized within the party's decision making processes and used to negotiate interests within the party collectively. While in the FNP this strategic negotiation is ongoing, in the UDB, the choice for electoral autonomy won the strategic argument. Proponents of strategic change drew explicitly on support and examples from EFA partners. Given its very small core set of elites, the UDB's organisational structure also allows for a useful examination of the way that elite entrepreneurs bridge the EFA/member party divide and mobilize information to lead to collective learning.

5.5 Conclusion

The Union Démocratique Bretonne does not have a central institutional role in the European Free Alliance. It has neither an EFA MEP nor an EFA board member. However, this chapter has shown the active engagement that UDB members have with EFA. Active EFA membership thus also has a component of choice and agency from the member party. UDB elites travel to EFA events and show a willingness to engage with both technical and ideological

information transmitted by EFA partners. Prominent *entrepreneurs* in the UDB, such as communications head Gael Briand and international affairs head Victor Gallou, have strong profiles in the EFA network.

Through their active investment, the UDB maintains a recognized presence in the EFA network. There is a strong contrast between the UDB's lack of power regionally and its connectedness within the EFA network. The UDB's commitment to internationalism and entrepreneurs' pro-active information-seeking behaviour engenders learning. Learning spans from the technocratic (campaign strategies) to the argumentative (on the feasibility of autonomism) to more macro-level strategic choices.

The latter is encouraged by *issue contestation* within the UDB on strategy, which saw the party distance itself from a former spokesperson who continued to work with the Socialist Party (UDB PR, 23/10/15). This debate incentivizes party elites to seek positive examples to support their argument. Interestingly, the UDB's discussion around having more ambitious electoral strategy and the use of transnational examples echoes discussions in the FNP about running in state-wide elections. Information about party strategy and a desire to improve electoral results is something that most small political parties share. The process of gaining electoral support is thus a key piece of information that both small party cases in this thesis sought from more successful EFA partners.

Learning in the case of autonomy policy is not a change in belief or behaviour, but rather a change in the underpinning arguments which support the UDB's autonomism. Drawing on information about the UDB's partners in Wales and Scotland, the party argues that autonomism is feasible and normal. They propose to copy certain institutional arrangements to emphasize the normality of autonomism. This adoption of new patterns of thinking shows a change in evidence and approach to autonomy policy that emerges from EFA partners. Contrasting the UDB's learning on autonomy policy and electoral autonomy

shows the importance of issue contestation; the lack of contestation in the former led to no discernable policy/strategy change but rather a change in argumentation.

Finally, the UDB also has a limited case of technocratic change on campaigning, with UDB members drawing on lessons learned in Glasgow at an SNP Youth training. Tracing the members' experiences of this training weekend is useful because it highlights a number of phenomena. First, the UDB members' widespread interest (five members attended) show the power of *electoral success* in the EFA network. As one member said, there are "very few relations with Scotland, even if we would like that there were more" (Interview 12). When given the chance to interact with the SNP, the UDB sought to send as many members as possible. Second, the discussions by members who attended emphasized the needs to transfer this knowledge to other UDB members. This shows how transnational interaction, undertaken by relatively few party members, must be extended to engender collective party learning.

This chapter has also touched on the difficulties the UDB faces in learning from EFA partners: its ideological activism leads to boundary-setting within EFA and its feeling of being too far 'behind' to adapt information from more powerful parties (especially the SNP). Activism in EFA also leads the UDB to a more collaborative approach to learning. The process of collaboration may engender learning, but it is not synonymous with party political learning. Collaboration requires working together towards a shared goal, which differs from the 'give and take' dynamic of learning. The UDB emphasizes its collegiality with EFA partners and shows signs of trying to develop collaboration. One member explained:

> "I tried to convince for example the Kurdish party (the HDP) to make some press releases but it's really difficult, because they have lots of problems. Here there is only a small membership and not the big one,

> so I can't reach the big parties...My objective is to do that, to make European movements a real European movement--not only two parties who speak to each other but two parties who speak together. It's not the same thing. I think it would be a really important European way to think" (Interview 21).

Such collaborative communication does very occasionally occur, sometimes facilitated through EFA. However, it is not yet widespread in EFA. In Chapter Eight, I will return to this concept and propose further boundaries and alternatives to learning in EFA which emerged from the cases.

Chapter Six : Esquerra Republicana de Catalunaya

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunaya (ERC) has long promoted both independence and the European Union. For many years, their vision of Catalonia in a 'Europe of the Peoples' was more radical than mainstream Catalan politics (Keating, 2000: 34). However, the party entered the Catalan Government for the first time in 2003. Since this time, ERC and the wider Catalan independentist movement has gained support. This culminated in a 2017 independence referendum, which was ruled illegal by the Spanish Government. The vote was held, but Spanish police were sent to intervene and claims of corruption and violence marred the result.

Throughout the process of organizing and conducting this referendum, both ERC and the wider Catalan independence movement were increasingly internationalized, by design of Catalan autonomists. After the 2017 independence referendum, Catalan President Carles Puigdemont moved to Belgium to avoid imprisonment in Spain. He noted at a 31st of October 2017 press conference: "I decided to come to Belgium—not Belgium, but Brussels. It's important to remark that, because I think this is the capital of Europe. I insist that this is a European subject."

Catalan autonomists have long been active in transnational politics and particularly in European networks. This chapter focuses on the transnational relationships *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalan Republican Left, ERC), which is a longtime member party and the only Catalan member party of the European Free Alliance. In section V, I briefly study the transnational relationships of another Catalan independentist party, *Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català* (Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT). PDeCAT is a member of another transnational political party. Through a comparison of PDeCAT and ERC's transnational networks, I consider whether TNP membership affects transnational interactions.

I do not find significant cases of learning in ERC. However, the party does see itself as a 'teacher' in the EFA network, particularly on the issue of mass mobilization. ERC also emulates the rhetoric of 'Scandinavian-style' welfare policy. I then explore why ERC does not learn. Lack of learning by Catalan autonomists is related to two phenomena: (1) their feeling that the Catalan situation is substantially different from their closest partner (Scotland); and (2) autonomists' focus on gaining international recognition before, during and after their independence referendum on the 1st of October 2017. In their international interactions, both main Catalan autonomist parties emphasize gaining international recognition for the right to self-determination.

The Catalan Government's para-diplomatic institutions also provide an outlet for politicians' international outreach. These are mobilized before political parties' relationships in their TNPs. I find no clear relationship between party learning and Government diplomacy. Section six will discuss the distinction and relationship between party and government transnational relationships.

Findings in this chapter are based on 14 interviews with members of ERC and PDeCAT and one interview with a founder of the ANC in July 2016 and May 2017. I also conducted a 2-day participant observation of the EFA observation to the 1 October 2017 referendum. It included a seminar at CIEMEN (a pro-Catalan independence think tank), attendance with ERC and PDeCAT politicians at the final campaign rally, and shadowing members of EFA in their observations at polling places on the day of the referendum. Interviews were conducted in English and French.

6.1 Introducing Catalan Autonomist Parties

Since regaining its Parliament in 1980, Catalonia has had a competitive political field with multiple autonomist and unionist parties. Autonomist parties in Catalonia include ERC, PDeCAT (previously the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia), and Popular Unity Candidacy (in Catalan, CUP). This thesis takes

the first two of these parties, which are the most prominent. ERC is the main case study, because it suits the criteria set out in the research design, which emphasizes parties in the European Free Alliance. Furthermore, ERC has been independentist for a longer period of time than PDeCAT. In this section, I briefly introduce each party.

(1) Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, shortened to ERC and often referred to as *Esquerra,* was founded in 1931. In 1934, ERC's President declared a Catalan state. In 1940, he was executed. Many other ERC elites were forced into exile during the Franco regime, resulting in organizational weakness (Elias, 2015: 86). The party was illegal until 1978 and remained marginal until the late 1990s. Experiences of the Franco regime still color the party's view on Spain. As one ERC MP explained, "But Spain, that's a democracy? A son of Franco's dictatorship. That explains a lot of situations that you can see in Spain" (Interview 22). ERC has been independentist since its founding, which sets it apart from PDeCAT.

It has a firm ideological position on the left. Elected members of Esquerra describe it as a social democratic party with a commitment to independence, social justice, equality and republicanism (Interview 26, Interview 22). Anwen Elias provides a good overview of the party's development in which she notes the renewal of ERC's left-wing credentials in the mid-1990s (2015: 86-91). A survey of ERC members shows that most members locate themselves on the left. However, between 1993 and 2004, its membership shifted away from extreme left positions towards more left/centre-left positions (Argelaguet, 2009: 90-92). This moderation may reflect the entrance of ERC into Catalan Government politics and its increasing electoral popularity as the Catalan nationalist field became more plural (Argelaguet et al., 2004).

The party's current president is Oriol Junqueras; Junqueras has been in jail since November 2017. In 2017, ERC were the third largest party with 21.4% of the vote. These latest elections highlighted the division between PDeCAT and ERC. Although they had been in a Parliamentary coalition since 2015, *Junts pel Si* (Together for Yes), the parties did not run on a united ticket in 2017. This decision was underpinned by disagreement and tension between the parties. This has continued into their relationship in the current session of the Catalan Parliament; conflicts have specifically occurred over the role of exiled President Carles Puigdemont (Jordan, 2018).

(2) Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català

The Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT) was previously known as *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC). As the CDC, the party formed an alliance with a smaller partner, the Democratic Union of Catalonia (*Unió)*. This alliance, called *Convergència i Unió* (CiU, Convergence and Union), was maintained from 1978 to 2015. The CiU led the Catalan Government for 23 years, from 1980 to 2003. From 2010 to 2018, the CDC (and subsequently PDeCAT) were part of ruling the Catalan Government, with their leader Artur Mas acting as Catalan President from 2010 to early 2016. Under Mas, the coalition with Unió dissolved when party leaders opposed Mas's plans to call an early election and to seek a mandate for secession (Gillespie, 2017: 409).

In 2015, the CDC ran in the Catalan Parliament elections on a *Junts pel Si* (Together for Yes) ticket with ERC and independents. In July 2016, the CDC changed its name to PDeCAT. This change was linked to two issues within the party: their move to support independence and the allegations of corruption against the CDC and its leaders. In the December 2017 elections, they ran on a ticket called *Junts pel Catalunya* (Together for Catalunya) alongside independent candidates.

PDeCAT is a liberal party that promotes pluralism, a federal Europe, an open and competitive economy, and Catalan independence. The party has long held a ‘catch-all’ position in the Catalan nationalist political discourse and takes a less defined ideological stance than ERC. Despite the often ‘accommodationist’ approach to Catalan autonomy, territorial strategy has always been an ‘all-encompassing’ policy area for the CDC (Elias, 2015: 85). Under Pujol, the party focused on promoting Catalan self-government within the Spanish state.

However, until recently, “in ideological terms, the CDC was very vague as to what the future holds, with long time president and leader Jordi Pujol promising 'assuring the survival of Catalonia and its strengthening'” (Walker, 1991: 299). Since 2012, the party has been ‘unashamedly in favour of independence’ (Interview 35). This change is perceived as a ‘radicalization’ in policy pushed by changing attitudes in the Catalan public since the debate over the Statute of Autonomy in 2006 (Crameri, 2015: 105). The change also reflects the party’s experience in opposition and pressure from sovereigntist internal factions such as the Nationalist Youth of Catalonia (JNC, Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya). The party’s 2017 electoral manifesto (under *Junts pel Catalunya*) fore fronted the Catalan independence process and denounced the forced exile of PDeCAT leader Carles Puigdemont.

6.2 Contextual Factors and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

Earlier in this thesis, I identified five factors about political parties that might affect the way a party exchanges information and thus learns. These factors are: electoral strength, governing responsibility, party centralization, key transnational entrepreneurs, and issue contestation. In ERC’s case, the most important factor is their rise in electoral strength and governing responsibility which give the party prominence in the EFA network and led to the 2017

Catalan referendum. Both ERC's prominence in EFA and the referendum hindered learning, as I will further explain in the next section.

Table 6.1: ERC Electoral Results Over Time

Election Year	Type of Election	ERC Vote Share (in Catalonia)	Position in Government
2017	Regional	21.4%	In Coalition
2016	National	18.18%	Opposition
2015	Regional	44.4%*	In Government
2015	National	15.99%	Opposition
2012	Regional	13.7%	Supply and Confidence
2011	National	7.07%	Opposition
2010	Regional	7.0%	Opposition
2008	National	7.83%	Opposition
2006	Regional	14.0%	In Coalition
2004	National	15.89%	Opposition
2003	Regional	16.4%	In Coalition
2000	National	5.64%	Opposition
1999	Regional	8.7%	Opposition
1996	National	4.18%	Opposition
1995	Regional	9.5%	Opposition
1993	National	5.10%	Opposition
1992	Regional	8.0%	Opposition
1989	National	2.68%	-

*Ran as part of the shared Junts pel Si electoral list with the CDC

(1) Electoral Strength

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya is now one of the most successful parties in EFA, but it only saw a rise in popularity in the late 1990s. This is evident in Table 6.1 which shows the increase in ERC electoral strength over time.

The increase in electoral support has made ERC a frontrunner in elections alongside PDeCAT and statewide Spanish parties. Throughout the period of study, there was a presiding feeling in ERC that the party was now electorally on parity, if not more successful than PDeCAT. One respondent explained: "We've taken a lot of votes away from PDeCAT, from the old Convergència. We've gained a lot of voters from the socialists, we've grown considerably where they have been losing voters wholesale." During its rise in 2003, ERC benefitted from its left-wing ideology, given the public distaste for the ruling Partido Popular administration's territorial policies. Increased electoral strength provided ERC with an elevated position in the EFA network which ultimately EFA hinders ERC's party learning.

Growth in vote share also changed ERC's transnational relationships. The party elected its first MEPs in 2004 and has consistently had MEPs since. They contest European Parliament elections as part of electoral coalitions. In 2004 and 2009, this coalition was the 'Europe of the Peoples' platform with other left-wing regionalist parties in Spain. In 2014, ERC ran with other left wing independentist parties in Catalonia on the 'Left for the Right to Decide' platform.

For ERC, transnational relationships have been linked to increased success. One member of the ERC European relations team explained that, at first, transnational relationships were "not that easy, from the perspective that we are a small party…We didn't have any European MPs until very recently, so we are starting with this facility to be more able to interact with other actors" (Interview 30). The party's increase in electoral strength leads to more resources to communicate (domestically and abroad) because "the more Members of Parliament here, both here and in Madrid, the more money you

have. Not only money, the more resources you have in general. You have more personnel, more assistance, more of everything" (Interview 31).

(2) Governing Responsibility

Esquerra has governing responsibility, but this responsibility has always been as part of coalitions (either with PDeCAT/CDC or in the *tripartit* governments[15]). Table 6.1 shows that ERC first became a party of government from 2003-2010, during the two tripartite governments with the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) and the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV). However, the government ran into difficulties during the drafting of the Statute of Autonomy. The Statute was 'less ambitious than ERC had intended' (Elias, 2015: 96). This was perceived by voters as a compromise to ERC's independentism and led to the drop of support in 2010 which saw ERC leaving government.

By 2012, ERC regained credibility on independence through a change in party leadership to "new faces untainted by the experience of coalition government" (Elias, 2015: 90). New leadership went alongside a moderation of their ideological position. The party began to prioritize independence as its goal and decoupled 'the independence brand's strong association with the revolutionary left' (Dowling, 2014: 225). Their previous experience in government altered ERC and may affect how they practice their responsibility currently. As a governing party, ERC now emphasizes achieving independence and achieving Catalans' right to vote on independence.

ERC eventually rejoined government: first with a confidence and supply deal with the CiU in 2012 and then in the Junts pel Si coalition in 2015. After joining the Government with Junts pel Si, ERC members played more of a role in the diplomatic institutions set up by the Catalan Government. The party has numerous members in the Catalan Government's External Action Ministry,

[15] The *tripartit* governments in Catalonia ran from 2003-2010 and were composed of a coalition of three parties: ERC, the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), and the Catalan Initiative-Greens (ICV).

both in ministerial and advisory roles. ERC's active transnational members are thus well integrated into Catalan governing institutions. In section VI of this chapter, I consider how the incorporation of ERC elites into the institutions of government diplomacy affects party transnational networking.

(3) Party Centralization

ERC decision making occurs through a process of *structured decentralization*. Ultimately, policy choices are made at party congresses (every four years) and conferences (every year). In between conferences, the national council meets and makes policy adjustments every three months. The party's national executive meets fortnightly and is responsible for 'day to day' decision making. However, the party decentralizes some responsibilities, particularly for policy exploration and communications, to sectorial commissions.

One commission focuses on 'Europe and the World.' Members of the international commission (or sectorial, as ERC members call it) organise events, attend events on international issues in Catalonia or abroad, write a newsletter, and contribute to the party's policy position on international issues. The sectorial chair and secretary seek to stay connected to ERC's MEPs. The head of the Europe sectorial is also a member of the national council; he works closely with the Minister for Europe and with ERC's MEPs. These MEPs are also on the national council. As such, those most active in European relations sit on ERC's central decision-making bodies.

ERC's youth wing, Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (JERC) has a separate membership and significant independence from its 'mother party.' JERC has its own offices and takes forward its own policy positions. Unlike ERC, JERC takes more radically left positions (Interview 28). Given their more radical ideological points of view, the patterns of transnational relationships and learning for JERC may differ significantly from those of ERC given their more left-leaning ideological platform.

(4) Key Entrepreneurs

ERC joined EFA as soon as Spain joined the EU and has been a member for over 30 years. ERC is deeply embedded in the EFA network. ERC has two MEPs in the European Free Alliance, Jordi Solé and Josep-Maria Terricabras. Solé is currently Secretary General of EFA, while Terricabras is EFA EP Group President. The current Catalan Minister for External Action was also an EFA MEP from 2014 to 2016. ERC's current secretary general was Secretary General of EFA between 2008 and 2012.

Catalan politicians are thus integral to the EFA network and widely known by other EFA members. Like its mother party, JERC also has extensive international contacts in EFA. The President of EFA Youth (Max Zañartu) and EFAy's Secretary General (Gerard Bona) are JERC members. Given the level of integration into EFA leadership structures, ERC members are likely to have regular interaction with other EFA partners.

(5) Issue Contestation

There was very little issue contestation in Esquerra during the time of study. The party was united in its left-wing positions. However, as noted before, the goal of a social democratic future for Catalonia was second priority to the primary goal of independence. One ERC MP explained:

> "Well, first, our principal priorities are the building of an independent state for the Catalan nation. We are working to organise a referendum and this is the first priority, here in the Parliament as members of *Junts pel Sí* in the coalition, because the coalition was organised for this objective. Then, we are a left-wing party, so we defend pluralism, human rights, the rights of people and environment" (Interview 27).

During much of the period of study of this thesis, ERC was focused on seeking independence and organising the independence referendum. In addition to maintaining unity in the Junts pel Si group, these external concerns subsumed conflict within ERC.

6.3 Transnational Interactions

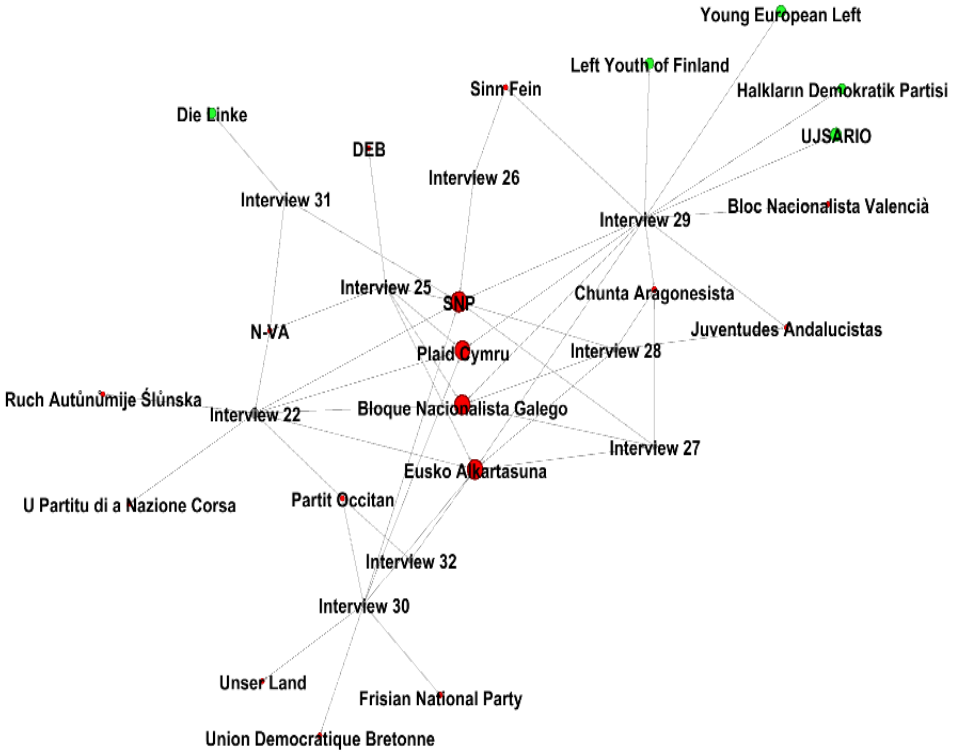
In this section, I explore the relationships that ERC has with parties across Europe. I identify different sub-groups of EFA that are important to ERC: parties in the Spanish state, higher performing parties, and left-wing parties. This section seeks to outline the shape of the ERC network in EFA and beyond. First, ERC engages with other parties through the European Free Alliance. The party has been involved in EFA since 1986.

As noted in the previous section, ERC members are well integrated in EFA and have often taken up prominent roles in the EFA structures. Second, ERC engages with European partners through connections in the Catalan Government. This leads them to develop and seek relationships with other regional governments and governing parties, as well as statewide parties. Governing responsibility provides more resources for ERC to have a transnational network beyond EFA.

(1) Network Diagram

Figure 6.1 shows ERC interview respondents' relationships in Europe. The most mentioned respondents were Eusko Alkartasuna (Basque), the SNP and the BNG (Galicia) which were mentioned by 5 out of 9 respondents. The next most mentioned respondent was Plaid Cymru. In the diagram below, member or affiliate parties of EFA have been coloured in red, whereas non-EFA parties are noted by green coloured nodes. There are multiple highly connected individuals (transnational entrepreneurs) within the ERC network, including interview respondents 22, 29, 30 and 25.

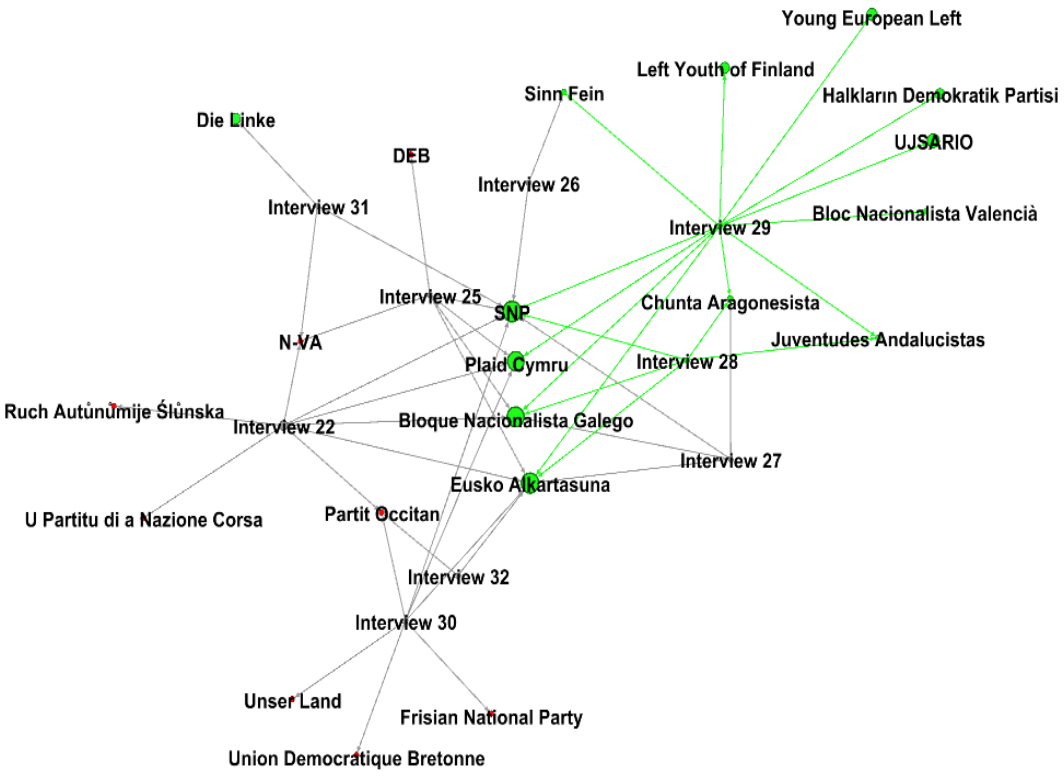
Figure 6.1: ERC Transnational Relationships SNA Visualization



In Figure 6.2, I colored the two interview respondents that are members of JERC to show the variance between these links and ERC connections. JERC's connections tend to the left wing and include connections made through 'youth' networks outside of the regionalist/nationalist family. One JERC respondent explained that their ambitions went beyond Catalan or regionalist politics. Rather, "our aim is to create an international youth movement…a global movement to fight neo-liberalism from its roots" (Interview 29).

These visualizations help to highlight the commonalities between many interview respondents, which I see as the party's key partners, and those parties which are more peripheral to ERC's network in EFA. The following section will provide a more elaborate explanation of ERC's close relationships.

Figure 6.2: ERC/JERC (green) Transnational Relationships SNA Visualization



3.2 Key Partners

An ERC MP and member of the Committee on External Relations and Cooperation described the regionalist and nationalist family as: "this network of parties, of stylized nations, so you can find people from Corsica, Sardinia, Occitania, Galicia, Euskadi, Basque Country, Silesia in Poland, Friesland in Netherlands, Sami in Norway, Sweden and Finland" (Interview 22). Within this

broader network, several relevant sub-groups in EFA are important to ERC: powerful parties, parties in the Spanish state, and left-leaning parties. Outside of EFA, ERC has begun to seek relationships with social democratic statewide parties across Europe.

Powerful EFA Members

One ERC elected member explained that the strongest links for ERC are "with the parties that are very strong also in EFA. For example, we have good links with SNP, also with N-VA" (Interview 25). ERC's international affairs spokesperson explained that, although their ideology did not match up with the N-VA:

> "The relationship with [the N-VA] is very good because they have nothing to fear from anyone…we're fine with them. We're not comfortable with their socio-economic policies, but from an international point of view, there's a good relationship" (Interview 31).

While the relationship to the N-VA is strained slightly by ideological differences, the party which was most mentioned was the Scottish National Party. One ERC MP explained: "the path followed by the SNP, we can follow this. We hope we can follow this" (Interview 22). A former SNP adviser who has worked regularly with Catalan partners noted that the relationship between the two improved significantly since ERC joined the Catalan Government in 2003. With ERC in government, the parties could speak diplomatically through the Catalan and Scottish Governments.

Furthermore, an active Breton member of EFA remarked on the rapprochement between the Catalan and Scottish movements: "Since the recent emergence of Catalonia, for EFA, it's interesting because suddenly the SNP are getting closer to EFA…Suddenly they found an alter-ego. And it's the discussions between the SNP and ERC that made EFA really come into its own again" (Interview 14).

In 2008, First Minister Alex Salmond met with then-ERC leader and Catalan Parliament Vice President Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira to discuss the regions' economies, internet domains, cultural enhancement and more (Kelbie, 2008). Catalan Vice President Pere Aragonès attended the SNP's 2018 conference where he met First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs Fiona Hyslop, and the leader of Glasgow City Council. Aragonès's visit also included a fringe event at the conference, chaired by SNP MEP Ian Hudghton. It is notable that, while head of JERC, Aragonès visited Edinburgh and met with numerous MSPs (JERC blog post, 2007). Relationships within EFA develop over long periods of time, encouraged by active individuals.

There is also a grassroots relationship between the two parties. Friends of Catalonia was set up by Glasgow City Councillor David McDonald. McDonald noted that Friends of Catalonia is "a place for SNP members to show their support for Catalonia, to learn more about the country and its journey towards independence." During the Catalan referendum, this bottom-up exchange between Scotland and Catalonia was also evident. For example, facilitated by JERC, SNP Youth sent 20 members to observe the referendum. Although the Scottish Government did not send an official attendee to the referendum, numerous SNP MPs and MSPs attended both the 1 October referendum and other important events, like the Catalan national day (the *Diada*) and elections.

Despite these efforts, ERC members report tension between the two parties. One respondent argued that there is an 'arrogance problem' between the two parties. ERC members noted that the Scottish Government did not send a minister to the referendum and lamented that the Scottish Government did not recognize the declared Catalan state after the 2017 independence referendum. They also noted the lack of official meetings between the two governments for the ten years between 2008 and 2018. One member of the ERC international sectorial said:

> "They have seen themselves for many, many years as the big brother of stateless nations, so have not wanted to become involved in regional parties, not even with the Catalans…After the Scottish referendum, which they lost, suddenly, we were the big brother, or at least we were sort of, you know, on a level. And they had nothing to lose" (Interview 31).

The relationship between SNP Youth and Esquerra's youth branch, Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (JERC), is seen as being better than that of their 'mother' parties. JERC's head of international affairs explained: "the SNP doesn't want to have more contact with Esquerra, but SNP youth does want to have contact with JERC, so that's something that shows how good our relationship is" (Interview 29). While there are tensions, the SNP serves as an important reference point for ERC and members express their commitment to the relationship.

Members of ERC also distance themselves from more peripheral and smaller EFA parties. A prominent member of ERC noted that "some of these parties even have a different ideology. But the truth is that we are in this group because also we don't have many other possibilities. We believe that our natural space one day when we will have our own state will be to be among the parties that we share ideology, and this is more like the social democrat, socialist parties which are around Europe" (Interview 30). Another noted that ERC would provide guidance for smaller parties. The respondent, a member of ERC's international sectorial, explained: "all those European regional parties look up to us. I'm very sorry for them …but we don't shun them in any way. We don't do what the SNP did. We're involved with EFA…We meet with them regularly and we're involved with them" (Interview 31).

Parties on the Iberian Peninsula and Mediterranean

Relationships between regionalist political parties in Spain are facilitated by institutional opportunity and necessity. For example, to win a seat in EP elections, regionalist parties across Spain have cooperated in electoral

coalitions. From 1987 to 2009, these coalitions were named some version of ‘Europe of the Peoples’ (i.e. ‘For the Europe of the Peoples’ in 1989 and 1994; ‘Coalition for the Europe of the Peoples’ in 1987). These coalitions always included EFA member party Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) from the Basque Country. In 2014, ERC left these coalitions to stand on a purely Catalan platform: *L'Esquerra pel Dret a Decidir* (EPDD; Left for the Right to Decide). The EPDD won two MEPs in the 2014 Parliamentary elections; these MEPs sit in the EFA EP Group. ERC is likely to run on a Catalan platform in the 2019 EP elections.

The change in European Parliamentary coalition suggests a move away from relationships with Spanish regions. However, relationships predate and extend beyond electoral coalitions. One EFA staff member explained, “the Basques and Catalans have always had direct contact which has been very continuous over the years, regardless of the political situation. Regardless of whether parties were or were not in government...there has always been this kind of loyalty and will of cooperation” (Interview 11). EA and BNG were seen by ERC respondents as ‘brother parties.’ For JERC, important youth partners included Gazte Abertzaleak from the Basque Country, Galiza Nova from Galicia[16], and Juventudes Andalucistas from Andalusia (Interview 29). The relationships were both historical and personal.

In its policy proposals, ERC explains: “we are, also, substantially and materially Mediterranean. Of origin and tradition. By necessity and by vocation” (Esquerra website, ‘Proposals’). While other Spanish regionalist parties do not always fit into the ‘powerful’ grouping which is valued by ERC elites, there is a more cultural link. The international affairs spokesperson for JERC explained, “if you look at the way we interact and also, at our inequalities, compared to the north of Europe, for example, it’s completely different and there is something within the Mediterranean countries that we share” (Interview 29). This shared culture

[16] Gazte is the youth wing of EA and Galiza Nova is the youth wing of the BNG.

was also linked to JERC's relationships with Kurds in Turkey, activists in Western Sahara, and Greek minority parties.

Social Democratic Parties

ERC has long held a social democratic ideology and the party emphasizes relationships with political parties that align with this stance. An ERC MP noted that an emphasis on social democratic policies "is common in Catalonia and in Scotland. It's not a discussion about the flag or identity or nation or roots. No, it's only about welfare, the civil rights movement" (Interview 22). In Germany, ERC "[has] been speaking to Die Linke…and we would very much like to discuss things with the German Socialist Party" (Interview 31). As the quote suggests, given the lack of institutional links and its independentist goals, the party finds it more difficult to access these statewide parties.

Nonetheless, the move towards seeking contact with statewide social democratic parties is not exclusive to relationships with Germany. In fact, this is a more recent trend in ERC. The leader of JERC explained: "We used to get in touch with nationalist parties and now, we are trying to make more relations with the left parties of the states" (Interview 28).

Through its social policies, ERC also has contacts outside of Europe. This is aided by their position in the Catalan Government and Parliament. One member of the Committee on External Relations and Cooperation explained, "We want to explain to other countries, to be a model with a social movement. For example, we are working on another side in South America with the peace process in Columbia. We have a lot of associations working there, as the Catalan Government" (Interview 27). Another respondent noted that JERC also reached out to parties in Latin America, on democratic participation and gender. This engagement was harder due to the distance, but "for us, what's very important is Latin America, in the sense that for us, it's an example of

socialism and that's something that gets us very interested in this" (Interview 29).

Just as ERC seeks relationships with social democratic parties, an active ERC transnational actor explained that they reject those with far right parties such as "Front National of France and Alternative for Deutschland, these kind of far right, anti-European and populist parties" (Interview 30). There are also red lines to the extreme left. In Catalonia, the *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (Popular Unity Candidacy, CUP) is further to the left than ERC. This means that further left regionalist parties sometimes prefer to work with CUP rather than ERC (Interview 29).

With Governments

Through the Catalan Government, ERC leaders also seek diplomatic relationships with governments. The former Catalan Minister for Europe Jordi Sole noted, "We have very good connections and relations with Flanders and Bavaria, the German Lander, Scotland as well. And this is also a way to try to build these connections with other regional governments, especially let's say the most powerful ones." These links are encouraged through the Catalan Government's delegation in Brussels, which liaises with other sub-state and national governments which have representations in Brussels.

Other reported modes of interacting with governments include Parliamentary groups (such as the All-Party Group on Catalonia and similar bodies in the Irish, Danish and Swiss Parliaments), visiting delegations (from Germany, Switzerland), and meetings with ambassadors (particularly from Scandinavian countries) (Interview 33, Interview 22). These relationships are "more formal, Parliament to Government, rather than inter-party cooperation" (Interview 31). Governmental networking is a separate strand to relationships with other independentists. One ERC MP and member of the Committee on External Relations explained:

> "Ten years ago, we were talking about nations in Europe and now, we're trying to talk with ministers, with other diplomats. So, this is a useful process. So, we're friends of Kabylie, we're friends of Tibet, we're friends of all the freedom fights, but we need freedom first…So, yesterday, I was in Galicia, next week I'm going to Corsica, because these are nations. But next week, I'm going to Baltic republics. So, as you can see, first there are nations but on the other hand, there are states" (Interview 22).

ERC elites are highly engaged in transnational relations, with many key entrepreneurs traveling and meeting with other parties regularly. Rather than focusing only on EFA, ERC has used its resources through the Catalan Parliament and Government to begin reaching out to states. This has created two pathways for reaching out to European partners: the political party route and the institutional route.

6.4 Learning in Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

Transnational relationships have several different consequences. As noted in previous cases, one predominant benefit is that they allow parties to reject stereotypes of being insular or exclusive. As one prominent ERC member explained, "We want to have a much higher perspective, because sometimes people say, which is not true, that people who are from the Iberic Peninsula, from Catalonia, that we are only looking around limited piece of land in this world which is called Catalonia and we don't care about the rest of issues, which is absolutely not true" (Interview 30). ERC members see relationships with regional governing parties (like the SNP and N-VA) and with statewide non-EFA parties as a priority. These relationships allow elites to project the view of ERC as both legitimate and internationalist.

While ERC elites have extensive transnational relationships, the party does not display significant party learning through EFA. Party members do not articulate specific information acquired from EFA partners nor do they explicitly adopt or refer to specific policies drawn from EFA partners. ERC displays a case of emulation, but this is not party political learning. Rather, ERC emulates a

‘Nordic’ model of socio-economic policy from state governments. The party also sees itself as a ‘teacher’ in EFA, particularly on mass mobilization techniques.

I argue that ERC does not learn because of its elevated status in EFA. Their regional success and the proximity of the independence referendum means that transnational relationships for ERC was focused on the issue of international recognition and *explaining* the Catalan process rather than acquiring information. Furthermore, the relationship with the SNP does not engender learning due to the feeling that the UK’s response to the SNP is significantly different and not comparable ERC’s fight against the Spanish state.

(1) Emulation: the Nordic Model

As previously discussed, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya is a ‘mainstream left’ sub-state nationalist and regionalist party. Their programme balances commitments to social welfare and equality with commitments to promoting independence. Transnationally, ERC seeks out social democratic parties. Regionally, social welfare policies were linked to the independence issue through a critique of central government welfare and budget cuts. This economic argument has weight with voters and extends beyond Catalonia, having also been identified in Scotland (Serrano, 2013). Through my research, I found that ERC elites emulate a ‘Scandinavian’ approach to social welfare policies. This emulation is not surprising given the link between independence and social welfare and their increasing outreach to social democratic parties in Europe.

Interviews showed that social democratic countries are often referred to as a model for a future independent Catalonia. For example, one of ERC’s MPs detailed a long list of commonalities between the party’s goals and Scandinavian countries:

> "Our model, like in health and education, is similar to the welfare state of Scandinavian countries. Our model is this one. The social democracy from Sweden, Denmark, Finland. The education frame in Finland, that's our goal. The welfare state in Sweden, that's our goal. The energy model in Denmark, with renewable energies, that's our model. The model of mobility in Norway, with electric vehicles, that's our model. It's these things that we're trying to do" (Interview 22).

The head of ERC's International Sectorial echoed these thoughts, noting that:

> "The patterns we want to follow are closer to the Nordic countries and countries which have got a dimension similar in size. Regionally, we know that we will never be able to compete with France, Spain, UK or Italy or Germany because in terms of size, population, GDP and everything, they will be always much bigger…we see ourselves more similar than models like Denmark, like Sweden, like the Baltic countries, like Austria, which are countries that in some sense have also, especially the Scandinavian ones, a more social democratic approach" (Interview 30).
>
> "The model which we believe we could be more comfortable is, for example, Denmark …they don't have the sources of income or the capacities of the big countries or the huge powers, but they have the possibility to be known by positive contributions towards humanity in terms of sustainability, in terms of being peace promoters" (Interview 30).

Another ERC MP and former Minister of Social Welfare explained that in developing welfare policies: "Nordic countries are for us very important to see, but we know that the context is different. Socially, strategically it's different. But for example, little countries: Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, are also important" (Interview 26).

These quotes show an interpretation and some adaptation of information about other states' models to suit Catalonia and ERC's social democratic ideology. However, this adoption of social democratic models from other states is not transnational party-to-party learning, as it has been set out in the early chapters of this thesis. Information is acquired from other *states,* not other political parties as I initially proposed. In other words, the 'teacher' in this case is not another political party but a government.

Furthermore, I would argue that the process of adopting a Nordic welfare model more closely resembles emulation than learning. Learning refers to a process that is more agential. In learning, there is a more specific and often direct interaction with partners which engenders information acquisition. In this case of the 'Nordic model,' respondents' knowledge and information is acquired from a distance. The policy models were not said to stem from any direct interaction with Scandinavian counterparts. One MP explained: "It's very easy with the internet to find a lot of information, but we can also speak with our MEPs about the kind of politics happening in other European Parliaments" (Interview 32). As such, this use of Scandinavian policy models on social democracy more closely resembles the process of emulation (also known as imitation or copying), rather than learning. Emulation differs from learning, because its purpose is less about problem solving and more the about "a search for credibility, status or simple conformity with international trends" (Meseguer, 2005: 73).

The search for status through the Nordic Model is clear in ERC politicians. They seek to internationalize their own ideology and elevate its credibility. As one ERC MP argued: "these countries of the North, they are our mirrors: Sweden, Norway. These are countries that have developed important social systems and we feel that we should copy certain of these policies" (Interview 32). They continued, "This is why we think we have something to bring to Europe…it is small countries who can guarantee a higher quality of life."

Emulation may also have a social element. Social emulation is particularly linked to the social construction of a certain policy solution as appropriate (Gilardi, 2010: 661). The quotes above indicate that Scandinavian countries are, in Catalan social democratic circles, understood to have the most appropriate policy solution. For example, despite a smaller size, Denmark "have the possibility *to be known by* positive contributions towards humanity" (emphasis added). Respondents suggest that Catalonia is the 'Holland of the

South' or a 'Northern' country in the South (Interview 30, Interview 35). The Nordic Model has often been imagined as a symbol of a 'Golden Age' of the welfare state and state institutions (Mjøset, 1992). Given the wider diffusion of the model and its alignment with images of Catalonia and ERC, it is a symbolically useful reference for ERC elites.

The use of Scandinavian models by these interview respondents does show some signs of deeper learning. Respondents engage in information interpretation. For example, the first respondent considers how the models are solutions to policy problems (education, climate change, mobility). They also align the ideologies of the Scandinavian models with that of ERC (social democracy). Meanwhile, the second respondent considers in some detail the size and shape of Catalonia and seeks to find models which suit the domestic context. MPs do recognize the similarities *and* differences between Scandinavian countries and Catalonia. One said: "Of course each country has their own way of doing things. We cannot copy it exactly" (Interview 32).

Notably, this is not a case of party-to-party learning. Rather, ERC elites seek information from other European states and adapt this information to their existing ideologies. The use of information about other governments fits with the trend of their transnational networking, which has been recently shifting towards relationships with statewide parties. ERC politicians, in this case, *use* their Government and Parliamentary roles as spaces for information acquisition and adoption. The use of government and legislative institutions for transnational relationships will be discussed further in section VII of this chapter.

(2) Teaching: Mass Mobilization

Studies of learning often focus on the 'importers' of ideas. Catalans also serve as a teacher in the learning process, defined by Bomberg (2007: 256) as "the carriers of ideas, the exporters or 'teachers' seeking to offer 'new information

and experience.'" The previous section showed that ERC is highly involved in EFA. Through these connections, ERC and Catalan civil society share their experiences in mass mobilization. Mass mobilization has been an important tool for Catalan nationalists since the protests held on the Catalan national day (called the *Diada*) in 2012. On the Diada in 2012, the ANC organised a protest which brought together 1.5-2 million people. This is seen as a seminal turning point in the Catalan independence movement. The march received significant attention from Madrid-based press and international press like the New York Times.

In Catalonia, "the capacity for mobilisation has always been a huge achievement of Catalan nationalism" (García, 2016: 230). In 2013, 1.6 million Catalans took part in building a human chain (the *Via Catalana* or Catalan Way) across Catalonia. This action was inspired by the 1989 Baltic Way, which reflects the emphasis put by Catalans on the Baltic countries as a space for inspiration in the fight for recognition. The Catalan "tradition of taking to the streets" also stems from the oppression of political organizing during the years of Franco's dictatorship (Interview 34). ERC's skill at mass mobilization is sought-after knowledge in EFA. For example, one Frisian politician attended the Catalan Way. That politician explained:

> "In Catalonia, you had a chain for independence from the Pyrenees to Tarragona. I also participated. Then you have a huge amount of solidarity because you're standing shoulder to shoulder and you're connected to hundreds of thousands of people across hundreds of kilometers. These types of examples, coming together on the street in demonstration, might also be possible in Friesland" (Interview 4).

In Scotland, Catalan National Assembly (ANC) members presented to Yes groups about the Catalan process. They focused particularly on "providing first-hand information on how their impressive campaign was organised from the streets upwards" (Hannan, 26 February 2018). Another observer from

Lombardy explained that he had attended multiple *Diada* protests and noted with envy the "spontaneity" of the Catalan mobilization.

One of the ANC's founders reported that Basque political organisations and NGOs:

> "…have been coming [to Catalonia] to say, 'How do you organise local referenda? How do you organise the Catalan human chains?' And, so let's say, we've been helping them, inspiring them and then even giving them advice at the technical level…there are things moving at the grass roots level in the Basque country which are fairly close to what we went through seven or eight years ago" (Interview 34).

One of the founders of the Friends of Catalonia explained that the group was considering how the ANC could help pro-independence organisations in Scotland (Interview 39). A representative from the Galician youth party, Galiza Nova, noted at an event during the Catalan referendum: "We see how Catalunya has mobilized. These social mobilizations are a big thing for us."

ERC politicians see their process as an exemplar for partners. One noted, "Well, there are a lot of countries with a violent, warring history. Columbia, with its terrorist groups, for example. Not here in Catalonia, luckily. So, I think this is the thing: How can we do this independentist process in a peaceful way?" (Interview 27). The Catalan Government's Foreign Action Plan (2010-2015) explicitly put forth "positioning Catalonia as a reference actor for other governments" as one of its goals (Vela and Xifra, 2015: 87). These cases of information seeking *from* Catalonia and politicians' ambition to project Catalonia as a peaceful process show that ERC and Catalan partners actively teach the nationalist and regionalist network.

(3) Barriers to Learning: 'The UK is not Spain'

Despite the SNP's prominence in ERC transnational networking, there is a significant barrier to learning between the two parties. ERC members feel that the difference between the UK and Spanish Governments' responses to

independence referendums significantly affects their ability to adopt Scottish strategies. As Catalan President Carles Puigdemont said to Alex Salmond: “Rajoy is not David Cameron, and the UK is not Spain” (RT, 16 November 2017). In the previous two chapters, electoral strategy and constitutional goals were important objects of learning. The feeling that the UK approach to referendums and independence is significantly different to Spain means that ERC politicians cannot easily interpret/adapt information on these key areas of exchange.

One ERC MP said: “The UK is more democratic than the Spanish state. So, we want this scenario but it’s impossible because Spain is impossible” (Interview 22). One ERC member of the international sectorial explained, “Scotland’s different because within the United Kingdom, it’s always been recognised as a nation. It’s taken a huge leap for Pedro Sánchez, very recently in the primaries for the PSOE, to say that Catalonia is a nation within a multi-nation Spain” (Interview 31).

SNP members also noted that there was a difference. One SNP politician who was involved with ERC noted his frustration at the implied reification of the UK Government (Interview 39). While Scotland is seen as a close partner, on the most comparable of their strategies—independence referendums—there is a block for ERC elites in adapting Scottish information to Catalonia. This hinders information exchange and interpretation to adapt the Scottish case to the Catalan context.

(4) Barriers: Seeking International Recognition

Spain’s denial of the right to self-determination referendums has been a serious hindrance to Catalan independentists. To overcome this, ERC politicians have sought international recognition and support. On both a domestic and international stage, ERC is focused on gaining the right to decide. This emphasis has hindered learning by dominating international relations and

engendering an ‘explaining’ approach by ERC politicians abroad. A member of JERC noted this preoccupation: “Esquerra is focused on getting the recognition once we’re an independent state. It’s their only priority” (Interview 28).

During the 2017 Catalan referendum, the search for international recognition became more prominent. ERC politicians sought to gain as many international observers to the referendum as possible. EFA delivered on this demand. There were 62 official EFA member observers and 52 EFAy observers, as well as 30 Quebecois observing the referendum. The presence of these international observers led to the dissemination of information about Catalonia, but given the heightened pressure of the event, the information mostly went *from* Catalonia abroad rather than *into* Catalonia. One of these observers explained, “They [Catalans] are the protagonists. We are only here to listen and to write down what we see.”

An ERC MP explained that: “in the Committee for External Relations, first of all, more or less, in the European area, we try to explain our desire of being an independent country. So, we explain the situation in other European countries, and we try to be a model” (Interview 27). ERC’s head of international affairs said: “We try to explain what’s happening in Catalonia, what is the roadmap towards independence, why do we want to become independent, how and when are we going to be an independent country, and we need to explain to everyone that will listen to us. And that’s what we try to do as a party.” The promotion of the Catalan cause disrupts the information acquisition process. First, learning is hindered because ERC focused on transmitting information outwards due to the referendum process.

Second, learning is hindered by a lack of resources which limit the ability to *both* project information and acquire it. Catalonia’s search for international recognition has spurred counter-diplomacy by Spain (Bourne, 2014). This

counter-diplomacy by Spain has drained Catalan resources to interact abroad. For example, one ERC MP said:

> "the Foreign Affairs, it's the property only of the Spanish state and they want to forbid us to do things. [They say]: 'Oh, you can't do this. You can't travel, you can't visit other parliaments, no.' But we're doing an agenda with other parliaments, other parties, other governments…We are talking with Scotland, of course, we're talking with the Flemish people, we're talking with the Welsh people. Also, we're talking with Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and, of course, the Baltic republics – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania" (Interview 22).

Many of the larger countries in the EU are not on this list (France, Germany, Italy, and Portugal, for example). They are notably missing from Catalonia's international outreach, most likely due to lack of access to state governments. Nonetheless, ERC politicians continue a programme of explanation and do so not only in EFA, but with many state governments.

When seeking to achieve the goal of international recognition, the EFA transregional network becomes a less *valuable* resource. That is, as one ERC MP explained:

> "You can be a friend of other countries, other political parties, but there's always only your own way because when you obtain independence, you need the recognition of other states…So we shut up about Catalan people, Basque people, Flemish people, about Occitan people, about Breton people, about Corsican people because at D-day, you need the diplomatic recognition of all the countries in the world" (Interview 22).

The party's distancing from other, smaller, regions includes the Catalan speaking regions in France and Italy. As a member of ERC's international relations team explained: "We're very serious about this independence thing, right? So, we don't want to make enemies and it's not going to be easy, convincing the French" (Interview 31). In a search for recognition, EFA parties become less important and ERC is thus likely to seek information from these relationships.

JERC's international affairs spokesperson explained: "Esquerra is a part of EFA. Esquerra likes to be in contact with other small nations, but now, as we're getting closer, all this is not relevant any longer" (Interview 29). The growth of ERC and its success leaves ERC with fewer parties to see as equals in EFA. Smaller parties regularly reach out to ERC and while the party 'tries to meet all these commitments,' they are more oriented towards contact with socialist parties across Europe (Interview 30).

ERC members see the need to distance themselves from other regions in order to gain support from states. One MP explained, "States form the EU. And in the EU, what counts are states" (Interview 27). Diplomatic blockage from the Spanish state means that, despite their efforts, ERC has little access to the statewide parties. Yet, to further legitimate themselves, the party distances itself from smaller EFA members.

ERC is less likely to learn from their EFA partners and more likely to focus their limited transnational resources on explaining the Catalan cause to states. This work is also channeled through Government and Parliamentary resources. As such, the goal of international recognition is shared with governmental actors and their coalition partner, liberal autonomist party PDeCAT. The next section will consider PDeCAT's relationships in Europe and compare PDeCAT with ERC.

6.5 The Role of TNP Membership in Transnational Relationships

In the research design of this thesis, an assumption was made that membership of a specific TNP (in this case, EFA) affects the interactions that political parties have in Europe. This assumption is built on the idea that the TNP provides numerous and regular institutional spaces for interaction. I reviewed and substantiated the ways that TNP's provide spaces for interaction in Chapter Three. The Catalan case allows me to further test this assumption. Catalonia's two prominent nationalist parties, PDeCAT and ERC, are members

of two different transnational political parties. PDeCAT is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE), which promotes a liberal platform at the European level. Meanwhile, ERC is a member of the European Free Alliance. My assumption that the TNP shapes transnational relationships is upheld. PDeCAT's network does go beyond the liberal network, but their relationships are with *powerful* nationalist/regionalist parties and they are limited and much less regularized than ERC's.

(1) PDeCAT and ALDE

Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català was a member of ALDE since Spain's entry into the EU. The choice to join a mainstream European political party rather than the more marginal EFA group stemmed from the CDC's long term governing power in Catalonia and its 'ruling party' mentality (Hanley, 2008: 166). The choice of ALDE may also be attributed to the relatively recent change to independentism in PDeCAT. The CDC's ideological leanings were previously more accommodationist and less aligned with EFA. One PDeCAT MP noted that the change in ideology towards independentism has sparked "a debate inside our new party to decide if this European parliamentary group is the best group for us or not" (Interview 24).

The political cost of ALDE membership has increased for PDeCAT since the entry of Ciudadanos into ALDE in June 2016. Ciudadanos is a right wing and unionist competitor to PDeCAT. One PDeCAT MP noted that Ciudadanos has as "one of their principal missions to abort our membership inside ALDE. So, we have to decide if their position in this group is the best position for us, or we have to go to another group" (Interview 24). These difficulties increased after the Catalan independence referendum. PDeCAT MEP Ramon Tremosa sat with Flemish MEPs rather than his ALDE group during an EP discussion on Catalonia. ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt was seen to be vocally in support of the Spanish state (Cooper, 2017). In October 2018, after fieldwork was

completed, PDeCAT was expelled from ALDE. This was ostensibly as a result of corruption allegations against the party, although many PDeCAT members suggest that ALDE was encouraged to expel them by Ciudadanos.

Nonetheless, PDeCAT's ideological positioning places it more clearly in the ALDE group than any other. One PDeCAT MP explained, "the Euro-deputies in the European Parliament from Esquerra Republicana, they are in the Green group. We are in the liberal group because we feel we are a liberal party with a very huge social feeling" (Interview 36). Further, some PDeCAT entrepreneurs deeply engaged in ALDE. Former leader and spokesperson Marta Pascal was vice president of ALDE between 2015 and 2017 and a member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CPLRE). PDeCAT respondents often mentioned then-party leader Pascal as a key interlocutor with other liberal parties. For other PDeCAT politicians, the relationship with other liberals was more 'virtual than physical' (Interview 24).

PDeCAT MEP Ramon Tremosa is also a key figure. Tremosa's engagements in ALDE are instructive to PDeCAT's stances in the Europe Union. The leader of PDeCAT's youth wing explained: "The party tends to orientate its policy according to what suits the MEP best at that time. I think the MEP is doing a very good job, so it makes sense for the party to do that" (Interview 35).

PDeCAT's youth wing, the JNC, is also involved in the European liberal sphere. The JNC is a member of the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY) and a member of LYMEC (the European Liberal Youth), as well as having a LYMEC board member. LYMEC is an organisation that brings together European Liberal Youth; it cooperates with ALDE. This relationship is recognized by PDeCAT MPs as relevant. One explained: "We have some people from the youth party that have been very involved in these European or international structures. We have Secretary Generals of LYMEC, we have

members of the IFILRY. So, I guess our youth party is one of the best-connected parts of our party with European and international groups" (Interview 24). Within these groups, the head of international affairs for the JNC explained that the party's closest allies "would be liberal parties from small countries, like Belgium, like the Netherlands, Estonia. Probably because small countries tend to share the same outlook on life and international politics, so our views tend to converge" (Interview 35).

Relationships with other liberal parties are centered on ALDE and the Brussels institutions, explained one MP:

> "From our party, our interlocution in these items is with the parties inside the Liberal and Democrat family, but we are now in the institutions, in the European institutions. So, in those institutions, we talk with a lot of persons or a lot of political members, not only from these parties but also from other parties that have responsibilities in the European institutions or in the European countries" (Interview 24).

This confirms the Brussels-centric relationship that PDeCAT holds to liberal parties. It also indicates the emphasis placed by elite members on both a liberal network and a *powerful* network in Europe. This latter interest and their increasingly independentist focus also led PDeCAT to develop a limited network of regionalists and nationalists, outside of EFA.

(2) PDeCAT and European Nationalist/Regionalist Parties

In Figure 6.3, PDeCAT interview respondents[17] are coloured blue to compare them with transnational relationships held by ERC respondents. ERC respondents reported a much wider range of transnational relationships across the nationalist and regionalist party family. It is also interesting to note that PDeCAT and ERC's regionalist relationships within the Spanish state differ based on ideology. I review PDeCAT's relationships with nationalist and

[17] Only four of five PDeCAT interview respondents could be incorporated as one interview was not recorded.

regionalist parties in this section and argue that they are less extensive due to the lack of institutional link through EFA.

One PDeCAT MP explained:

> "We have contacts with the liberal parties; we have contacts with nationalist parties. We have had friendship with Belgium's Flemish or the Scottish because it's very clear that we have a shared ideology. We will defend a view for our country, so we have to apply it in our relationships abroad. But we also believe that we have to have relationships with nationalist parties…So on one side we relate with liberals but on the other side we also relate with nationalist parties" (Interview 36).

However, PDeCAT MPs and elites only reported relationships with sub-state nationalist parties in the Spanish state and the most powerful nationalist parties. Of the latter category, the most prominent is the SNP. This has strengthened since PDeCAT's choice of a pro-independence stance (Interview 24).

In July 2018, former Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond made a speech to the PDeCAT annual assembly and PDeCAT Catalan President Quim Torra met with current First Minster Nicola Sturgeon. The meeting was requested by the Catalan Government to speak about the situation of Catalan political prisoners, but it addressed far reaching topics of discussion such as the economy and the shared interest in national investment banks (Interview 49). PDeCAT MPs also traveled to Scotland for the 2014 independence referendum.

Beyond the Scots and the Flemish, PDeCAT respondents did not report a wider network of relationships with nationalist and regionalist parties across Europe. The head of international affairs for the PDeCAT's youth wing explained, "We are quite cautious with speaking to other separatist parties because unfortunately, in many cases, racism and separatism tend to go together… we try to have good relations with the SNP because they share our vision of civic nationalism" (Interview 35).

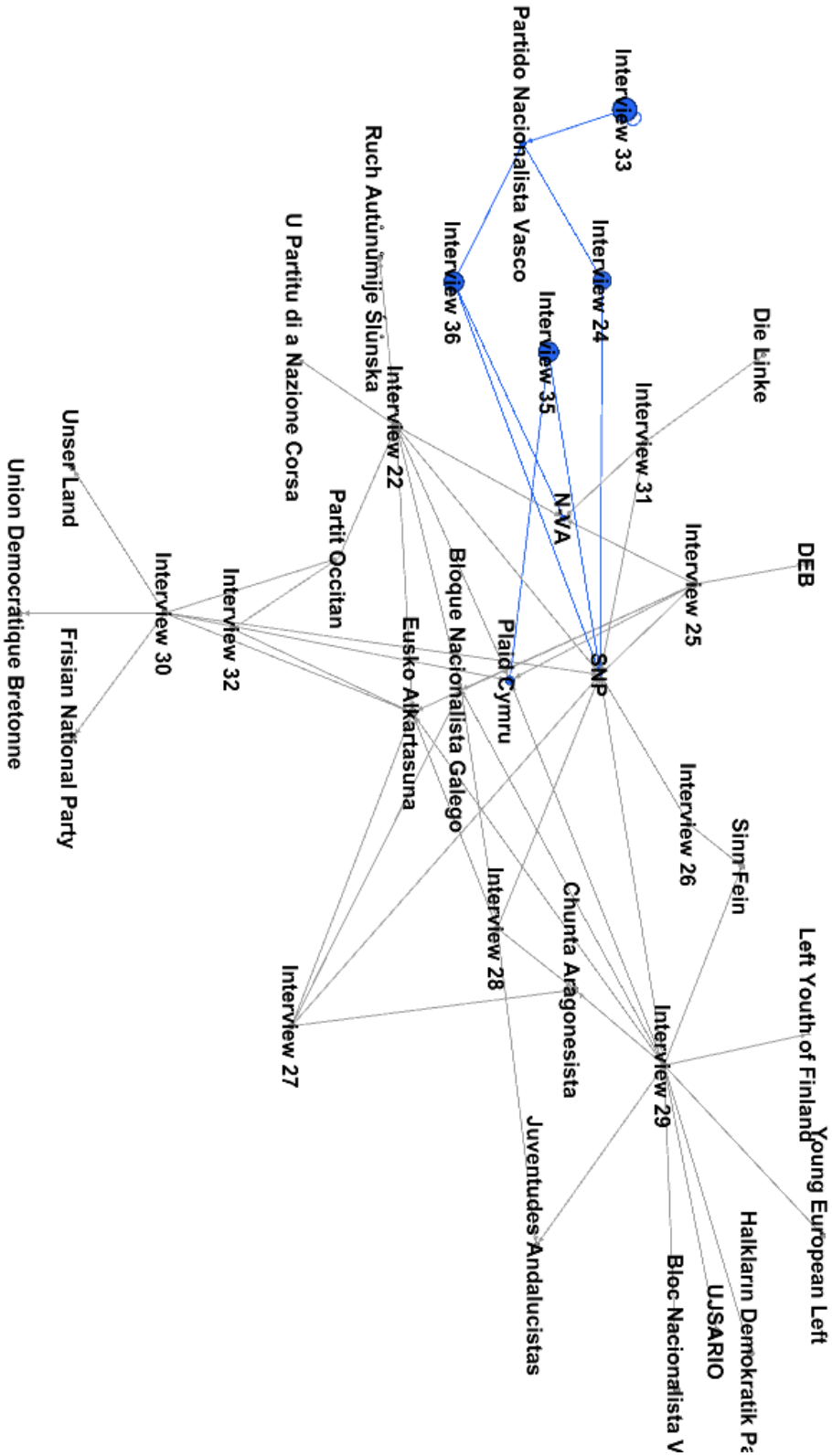


Figure 6.3: Catalan Transnational Partners (PDeCAT in blue)

PDeCAT interview respondents did report more intensive relationships with other Spanish regionalist parties, particularly the Basques and, to a lesser extent, the Galicians (Interview 23). This was built on common ideologies, a common opponent (the Spanish state), and personal friendship. For example, one of the Catalan Parliament's Vice Presidents explained, "We know the Basques. In reality, they are very good friends of ours" (Interview 33). The Spanish state provides institutional opportunities for PDeCAT to meet other Spanish regionalist parties. One PDeCAT MP explained:

> "Historically, we have good relations, especially with Basque nationalists. Our brother party, to say this way, is Partido Nacionalista Vasco, PNV, who is in the Government now. Their strategy and our strategy are a little bit different, but we have common problems because our state is the same state…. We meet them, especially in Congreso de los Diputados and Senador, Spanish courts, and several times, we help each other to achieve solutions for the common problems" (Interview 24).

PDeCAT respondents' relationships are with *non-EFA* Basque nationalists, as compared to ERC's relationships in the Basque Country. The Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) is a member of the European Democratic Party, which sits in the European Parliament with ALDE. As such, PDeCAT is neither active in ALDE, nor in the nationalist and regionalist network. With nationalists and regionalists, their relationships are conditioned by access either through diplomatic relationships (as with the N-VA and SNP) or the Spanish state. Without the linkage of EFA and due to tensions with ALDE during fieldwork, PDeCAT respondents report very limited transnational relationships.

(3) Converging Catalan Transnational Relations

Despite having significantly different transnational networks, ERC and PDeCAT have begun to take a more united approach to transnational networking. This is in spite of their different transnational networks and centered around their shared role in the Catalan Government. One ERC MEP explained, "[PDeCAT] are with the liberals, but as a government, as a group, it

makes no difference" (Interview 25). Another ERC MP said: "I think there are no longer too many differences…In the moment of truth, PDeCAT has evolved and Esquerra has too. PDeCAT and ERC MEPs have done a huge amount of work together" (Interview 26). This latter point, about the collaboration between MEPs also highlights the conflict between ALDE and PDeCAT. In some conversations with EFA members, it was suggested that PDeCAT might join EFA. If this were the case, and in the lead up to such a move, I would expect the parties' transnational relationships would begin to converge.

PDeCAT and ERC's approaches and transnational relationships clearly differ. However, politicians use their legislative and governmental roles (and resources) to enact a shared approach to European relations. In particular, PDeCAT politicians share ERC's preoccupation with gaining international recognition which I touched on in the previous section. One PDeCAT MP explained: "It's very curious because five or six or seven years ago probably nobody in the world knew anything about what's going on, what was going on in Catalonia. Right now, a lot of people all around the world, several different countries, want to come here and want to know in first person what's going on" (Interview 36). PDeCAT President Puigdemont was one of the key proponents of internationalizing the Catalan process, not least through his physical exile to Brussels. Puigdemont's discourse shortly after the referendum, "was mostly addressed to the international community, seeking to show responsibility and emphasizing the need for dialogue and calls for mediation" (Cetrà et al., 2018: 130).

One MP from PDeCAT noted: "It's very important for us right now to explain abroad what is going on – what is going on with this process, why we want to leave, why we want to be a state" (Interview 36). Another PDeCAT MP explained: "For our political project, it's very important that the independence process in Catalonia has the recognition of the world and, first of all, of the

European institutions. So, one of our missions, now from the Parliament but also from the Government, is to explain our strategy" (Interview 24).

The explanatory approach to the international community is driven by ERC and PDeCAT politicians, using the Catalan Parliament and Government. The parties have, over a longer period of time, built up different European networks. Due to its relationship with EFA, ERC is more embedded in the nationalist and regionalist party network. PDeCAT has previously aligned itself with liberal parties. However, cooperation in the Catalan Government and surrounding the recognition of Catalan independence has brought the parties' transnational approaches closer together. The following section explores how ERC party transnational networking interacts with Government diplomatic resources and the extent to which this relates to party learning.

6.6 Catalan Institutional Diplomacy and Learning

Both ERC and PDeCAT party elites interact with politicians across Europe through their party networks (EFA and ALDE respectively) and bilateral connections. However, since gaining control of the Catalan Government, they also use Government and Parliament access to establish connections. Catalan para-diplomacy has a long history. This section first reviews Catalan diplomatic efforts, before considering the case of politicians' relationships across the Mediterranean. This case is used to consider how party and government international relations interact.

Catalan diplomacy has been entrenched in civil service-driven institutions. This creates a disconnect between transnational party networking and Catalan diplomacy. Furthermore, Catalan diplomacy focuses on policy-oriented interregional networks rather than ideological goals. The plethora of Catalan interregional networks and para-diplomacy provides an area of further research into different *sources* of learning in regions beyond the EFA party network.

(1) Development of Catalan Diplomacy

Catalonia was one of the first regions to engage in regional representations in Brussels. In 1982, they established an office in Brussels. This was developed through ‘a public-private formula’ first called the *Patronat Català Pro-Europa*, then *Patronat Catalunya Món* and now the Catalan diplomacy organisation *Diplocat* (Cetrà and Liñeira, 2018: 723). This Catalan representation in Brussels was established before Spain became a member of the European Community (Nagel, 2004: 63). It was seen as a personal project of longtime President of Catalonia Jordi Pujol. However, while Pujol was personally instrumental, the internationalization approach of the Catalan Government did not end with his presidency.

Through changes in political leadership, Catalan diplomacy has become more and more institutionalized. Institutionalization can be seen in the Catalan *casals* (Catalan Communities Abroad) and proliferation of *para-embassies* (Xifra, 2012: 71). The creation of a Catalan foreign ministry and minister strengthens the base for this behaviour. Furthermore, Catalan international relations and diplomacy draws on civil society and culture (Vela and Xifra, 2015). The ANC’s creation of international branches since 2011 further added to this institutional density.

The Catalan Government has set up many institutions including the Catalan Agency for Cooperation for Development, the Agency for Innovation and Internationalization in Catalan Business, the Institut Ramon Llull, the Council for Catalan Communities Abroad, and Diplocat. It is well known that, “Catalonia is one of the most active European regions in [interregional networking]. It participates, for example, in the Working Community of Regions with Industrial Tradition (RETI, 1984), in the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR, 1986), in the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR, 1987), not to forget the Assembly of European Wine Growing Regions (AREV)” (Nagel, 2004: 63).

Para-diplomacy has continued through numerous changes in party power in Catalonia. It began under Pujol but continued through the Socialist-led *tripartit* Government and the PDeCAT/ERC coalition. The Catalan Government joined and developed a wide network of para-diplomatic organisations. This bureaucratic web ensures that Catalan Government diplomacy remains differentiated from party politics.

In fact, given its resources, the Catalan Government's para-diplomatic network guides politicians' international relations. As one ERC member of the Catalan Parliament's External Relations Committee noted: "I am working in the Committee here in Parliament, not in the Government…I follow in their line" (Interview 27). One example, they explained, is that Diplocat will invite MPs to dinners or meetings, which are arranged by the Government. The European Free Alliance can thus shape the partners that *parties* have but the Catalan Government and governmental agencies also have influence on how politicians relate across borders. As such, in cases such as this, where a party has access to significant para-diplomatic resources, I expect that the effect of the transnational political party is reduced.

(2) The Case of Mediterranean Cooperation

In interviews, the case of Mediterranean cooperation emerged as a goal for ERC elites and the Catalan Government. Catalonia serves as the base for the EU/Mediterranean partnership, the Union of the Mediterranean. As a party, ERC sees itself as having an affinity with the Mediterranean. ERC envisions the new Catalan state as a leader in the Mediterranean, working to address shared issues such as immigration and climate change. One ERC member of the Catalan foreign affairs ministry explained:

> "We want to be one of the hearts of this Mediterranean and to be an area which is the countries come, different countries, especially from the south, and they can learn and share the practices with us, and we can

> develop models…We have a lot to share with Mediterranean countries and we believe we have something to contribute" (Interview 30).

The Mediterranean is envisioned as a space for Catalan policy projection and cooperation, through the sharing of 'models' or best practice. This behaviour is linked to ERC's work on international recognition. For example, in the quote above, the assertion that 'we have something to contribute.' Another ERC MP explained, "We have inputs about sympathy in other countries that it's better not to say, but we think that if Catalonia becomes a republic, our situation in the Mediterranean Sea will be eased and important" (Interview 26). Catalan Government outreach in the Mediterranean is thus complemented by ERC's ideological assertions of Catalonia's ability to be independent.

However, in its day to day implementation, Catalan diplomacy in the Mediterranean is much more oriented towards seeking *policy solutions*, regardless of the *politics* of partners. Groups like the Union of the Mediterranean include participants that are not sub-state nationalists and do not support sub-state nationalism. Historically, interregional networks have never been exclusively the realm of *regionalists*; regionalization has been a project separate from autonomism (Loughlin, 1996). Among political elected elites, the Mediterranean is seen as a place for developing policy networks. There was no widespread mention of achieving regional political goals or ideals through this network; only leaders of the more radical youth wing JERC noted the political issues of networking in the Mediterranean (i.e. colonialist attitudes and the Arab Spring) (Interview 28, Interview 29).

The spokesperson for ERC's international sectorial explained: "We try to keep the two things apart. In other words, when we decide on international relations policy, from the point of view of the party, it has to be one thing. And as a government party, when we discuss international relations as a government party, for the Government, it's another thing" (Interview 31). Governing responsibility and access to the para-diplomatic network of the Catalan

Government has given ERC politicians another pathway through which to engage in international relations. However, this is kept separate from transnational party networking. This differentiation means that Catalan para-diplomacy does not directly relate to or engender political party learning.

6.7 Conclusion

The case of Catalan independentist parties has provided a useful contrast to smaller, non-governing parties. Both Catalan parties' *governing responsibility* affects their approach towards transnational partners. Using government resources, ERC seeks out statewide parties. They also work together in Government with PDeCAT to provide an image of unity and to seek international recognition. However, ERC and its most transnationally active elites have a wider network of contacts across the regions of Europe, which is facilitated by their membership of EFA since 1986. ERC members thus engage and seek out with two transnational networks: (1) EFA regionalist and nationalist 'sister' parties and (2) ideologically similar, social democratic statewide parties.

Within the EFA network, ERC finds "a platform where you can get to know people, get to know other parties, establish regular relations with other parties" (Interview 25). Access to these regular transnational/transregional relationships is facilitated specifically by membership of EFA. The Catalan case has allowed me to substantiate a basic assumption of this thesis: that membership of a specific TNP affects transnational relationships. Furthermore, as suggested in the UDB chapter, active individuals can make membership of a TNP more active and useful for a party. While PDeCAT has some relationships with *governing* regionalist and nationalist parties, they do not report regular or extensive interactions with EFA members. Even in Spain, PDeCAT engages with non-EFA sub-state nationalist parties.

On the other hand, ERC is highly engaged in EFA networking and has many *key entrepreneurs* such as the head of the EFA EP group, EFA President, President of EFA Youth, and Secretary General of EFA Youth. Despite this highly active membership of EFA, ERC does not display significant cases of learning from EFA partners. However, as a consequence of its electoral strength, ERC does see itself as a 'teacher' in the EFA network, using their skills in mass mobilization. Their governing responsibility and attempts to work with states also lead to a case of emulation/copying in the adoption of the 'Nordic' or 'Scandinavian' welfare model.

I identified two reasons for the lack of further learning: (1) the perceived difference between the UK and Spanish governments responses to independence referendums; and (2) the emphasis on seeking international recognition. The former of these makes it difficult for ERC to interpret information from their closest partner, the SNP, as relevant or adaptable to the Catalan context. The latter is a consequence of ERC's electoral success and governing responsibility, because of its focus on promoting and seeking to 'win' the independence referendum in October 2017.

The 1 October referendum posed significant methodological difficulties for my research. Interviews for this chapter were conducted in July 2016 and May 2017. Both interview periods were before the official referendum date was announced, but the latter period of interviewing was particularly close to the announcement of the referendum (9 June 2017). Even in 2016, discussion of the referendum dominated interview responses because the government had made it clear that a vote was imminent. As one interview respondent explained, "Catalan politics in general, not just in my party, has kind of gravitated around this over the last few years. As you may already know, in September or October, we'll be having a referendum and from here until then, basically, almost everything's focused on that referendum" (Interview 35).

It may be useful to consider the role of such important domestic events to parties' transnational networking. The case of Catalonia suggested that the referendum was a significant intervening variable in their process of transnational engagement. Future research could be done to compare this period of the referendum to Catalan transnational networking at other times, or to explore how other parties' transnational networking has been affected by referendums (for example, comparing SNP and ERC behaviour during their referendum processes).

It would also be useful to consider further cases of how para-diplomacy and interregional networks affect learning. The bureaucratic web of Catalan para-diplomacy drives a policy-oriented interregional networking, as I have used the case of Mediterranean cooperation to illustrate. ERC politicians *use* the Catalan Government for information seeking, which provides an alternate route and sets them apart from their more politically and ideologically driven EFA party network. However, this requires significantly more investigation to become more generalizable. Research on interregional networks through a lens of learning would be a useful complement to my research on EFA's transnational party networks.

Chapter Seven: The Scottish National Party

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has been held up as an exemplar by many other parties in the European Free Alliance. This status stems mostly from its rise in power, from a longtime fringe and opposition party, to one of the most successful regionalist and nationalist parties in Europe. Many in the SNP attribute their sustained success to their competence in government. Studies of the 2007 and 2011 Scottish Parliament elections suggested that "performance politics was the key factor in those results" (Johns et al., 2013; Johns et al., 2009). This politics of competence, authors argue, is "that most mundane of electoral reasons" (Johns et al., 2013: 158). The SNP has long aspired towards this mundane ideal, working towards 'mainstreaming' or 'normalizing' itself.

Hepburn (2009) asserted that many nationalist and regionalist parties have made the move from 'niche to normal.' To do so, they carefully balance a 'competence' approach with their political goal of radically altering the state. As earlier chapters have shown, EFA's smaller member parties see the SNP as the model example of this balancing act. As Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans said at EFA's fringe event at the SNP's 2012 conference, "This is not a race and it's not a competition; we're all working together in solidarity with one another. It is a process of normalisation: each of our nations, in its own distinctive way, seeking normality in the wider European family of nations."

The SNP's success and ambition at mainstreaming is also pervasive in their approach to international relations. In many ways, normalizing the SNP hinders EFA's goal of encouraging relationships between parties. The SNP's headline European integration policy of 'Independence in Europe,' first adopted in 1988, was not about radical change or a 'Europe of the Regions' as envisioned by other regionalists. In fact, the party's ambition was and is to achieve statehood in Europe, to be a 'normal country' (Interview 49). The first two sections of this

chapter will further introduce the SNP and the proposed contextual factors that may affect party learning. I argue that the SNP's sustained success and mainstreaming approach to the EU have affected their relationship with the European Free Alliance. The third section will show that, unlike other parties in this thesis, the SNP's knowledge and interest in EFA partners is low. Conversely, its interest in engaging with powerful regional parties and statewide social democrats is high.

In the fourth section of this chapter, I find that the SNP does not display learning from their relationships in the European Free Alliance. I argue that the SNP's success, governing power, and centralized internal structure hinder learning. However, given their elevated position in the EFA network, the SNP has sometimes taken on a teaching role in the nationalist and regionalist network. The party does display learning from non-EFA partners such as Nordic countries and the Parti Québécois.

The SNP mobilizes the Scottish Government's para-diplomatic strength to seek international inspiration from other states, rather than political parties. As such, I conclude this chapter by considering the role of institutional diplomacy. The SNP's governing resources and elected members' personal initiative has expanded their transnational network significantly beyond EFA. The cases of the Nordic Model and Brexit reveal the way that the SNP uses governing resources, rather than transnational party networking, to learn.

7.1 Introducing the Scottish National Party

The party defines itself pithily as: "Scotland's largest political party and party of government. Centre left and social democratic." (SNP website, "About," 16/10/18). This self-definition provides a useful basis upon which to briefly introduce two important threads in the SNP's history. The first aspect of the SNP's development is ideological movement on two scales: the centre-periphery and the left-right. The second strand, as I have touched on, is its

move from the fringes of British politics to be leaders in Scottish politics. These two components of the SNP considerably affect their relationship to other European political actors and their capacity for learning.

The Scottish National Party was founded in 1934 and it did not have a particularly fortuitous electoral start. The party underwent numerous internal schisms; a brief spike of success in the 1960s led to a 1970 article apocalyptically named “The Rise and Fall of the Scottish National Party” (McLean, 1970). This prediction did not prove true; the SNP performed well in the two general elections of 1974 and local elections in 1977 and 1978 (Lynch, 2009: 622). Winnie Ewing was also elected as the SNP’s first MEP in the first European Parliament elections in 1979.

Significant scholarly work has traced the history and growth of the SNP over the last forty years (Farbey et al., 1980; Lynch, 1996; Lynch, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2011). This thesis will not replicate this work. However, understanding the SNP’s position in the EFA network must begin from an understanding of the party’s evolution in Scotland. The party’s shift towards becoming an ‘electoral-professional’ party was underpinned by the changing opportunity structure of devolution as well as elite driven changes to the party’s constitution and organisational structure (Mitchell et al., 2011: 34-53).

Ideologically, autonomism has always been a foundational proposition of the SNP, although the party undertook a debate between more ‘home rule’ and independence played out, in the 1970s and 1980s. The debate split the party significantly, but a version of gradualism ultimately prevailed (Mitchell, 1988: 475-476). This gradualism allowed the SNP to take part in and benefit from the 1997 devolution referendum. From 1997-2009, SNP manifestos have shown it to be a social-democratic party, slightly to the left of the ‘broad church’ center (Massetti and Schakel, 2015: 869, 876). Their centre-left positioning is linked

to autonomy goals, with independence being framed ‘in terms of the economic dividends that it would bring to Scotland’ (Elias, 2018: 8).

Since the adoption of the ‘Independence in Europe’ policy, the SNP has continued to be a broadly pro-European party. One MSP noted: “Scotland had always had that interest in Europe in the wider sense as a trading partner and as a cultural partner…There has always been a much more Europhile attitude in Scotland to the rest of Europe” (Interview 44). This pro-Europeanism and the SNP’s sustained power in Scotland in the last 20 years has made the party a sought-after actor in the EFA network.

7.2 Contextual Factors and the Scottish National Party

In the theoretical framework of this thesis, I identified the process of learning and five contextual factors which would affect it, including: electoral strength, governing responsibility, party centralization, presence of key transnational entrepreneurs, and issue contestation. In the Scottish National Party, each of these factors plays a role in (predominantly) hindering learning from the EFA network, but its electoral strength, centralization, and lack of entrepreneurs in EFA are particularly relevant. Its governing responsibility, as I will show in section V of this chapter, allows the SNP to learn from non-EFA partners, both state-wide parties and other governments.

(1) Electoral Strength and Governing Responsibility

With the creation of the devolved Scottish Parliament and Executive, the SNP’s electoral fortunes improved. Devolution included the Additional Member System (AMS) and a distinctly Scottish political sphere which were more favorable to the SNP (Mitchell et al., 2011: 11). In 1999 Scottish Parliament, the SNP sat in opposition to a Labour Government. The 1999 election proved difficult in part because the party had to contend with moving from the ‘margins’ of politics to being ‘close to power’ (Jones, 1999: 9). The 2003 Scottish Parliament election saw another ‘disappointing’ performance for the SNP,

which was seen to have suffered from the rise of smaller, anti-establishment parties (Denver, 2003: 51). However, in 2007, the SNP won 32.9% of the constituency vote, an increase of 9%. Since then, the SNP has been the ruling party in the Scottish Government.

Table 7.1 Scottish National Party Electoral Results (1997-2018)

Year	Type of Election	Vote Share in Scotland	Governing Position
2017	Statewide	36.9%	Opposition
2016	Devolved	46.5%*	In Government (minority)
2015	Statewide	50.0%	Opposition
2011	Devolved	45.4%*	In Government
2010	Statewide	19.9%	Opposition
2007	Devolved	32.9%*	In Government (minority)
2005	Statewide	17.7%	Opposition
2003	Devolved	23.8%*	Opposition
2001	Statewide	20.1%	Opposition
1999	Devolved	27.3%*	Opposition
1997	Statewide	22.1%	Opposition

*constituency vote share

However, this success was preceded by many years of low voter shares before devolution. Given its relatively recent rise, the SNP is still focused on proving its ability to be a ‘party of government.’ To cultivate that image, the SNP has balanced its independentist goals with the promotion of ‘Scottish interests’ and what is ‘good for Scotland’ (Mitchell et al., 2011: 142). The focus on maintaining and achieving higher electoral success isolates it from some European Free Alliance members. One senior party and government adviser explained: “We

became a government up here and with Westminster group expanding…we try to be a proper country, working within the confines of what the UK Government will allow us to do" (Interview 49).

After the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections, the SNP now forms a minority government in Scotland. This may hinder the ability of the government to build relationships internationally as frequently. As one senior staff member explained, "I would like to send ministers to more countries more of the time, but they have to turn up and vote because we're a minority government" (Interview 49). Nonetheless, the SNP has used its control of the Scottish Government for the last 12 years to develop Scotland's international network. In the last section of this chapter, I will delve into the way that the SNP links these diplomatic partnerships and its party-based transnational relationships.

(2) Party Centralization

Like most nationalist and regionalist parties, the SNP was founded with a more grassroots, 'movement' style organisational structure. The party's original openness and 'participative bias' allowed for internal factionalism and conflict throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Newell, 2003). However, as the party developed, stronger leaders emerged. Higher numbers of elected members in the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood meant that senior party staff and members had "a desire for greater professionalism and administrative efficacy" and that the party had a need for cohesion (Mitchell et al., 2011: 36). This was also driven by the understanding that, as one central staff member said: "divided parties don't win elections" (Interview 52). The party now has what I would call a *centralized* organisational structure.

The SNP's membership expanded rapidly after the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, from 25,000 at the end of 2013 to 125,000 members following another spike in mid-2018 (Lee, 15 June 2018). Survey data from Mitchell, Bennie and Johns (2017) showed that new members have

not changed the social or ideological profile of the SNP, as one might expect, because of the strong link made between left/right positioning and support for independence. membership growth has meant that the SNP has had to incorporate many new members, but in fact most of its core activists and policies remain the same. As one long time party staff member explained, “People joined us because they liked who we are” (Interview 52).

Mitchell et al. (2011) noted that elite SNP members argue that the party is participative, due to its status as a ‘national movement’ and a ‘broad church.’ However, the SNP “is much more coherent ideologically than might have been expected but, on the other, less participative and decentralized than this internal myth would suggest” (Mitchell et al., 2011: 140).

My interviews confirm this finding. There was a narrative among senior SNP members that the party is highly participative which is based in procedural claims about the process of decision making. Procedurally, the party’s conferences are the ‘supreme ruling body of the SNP’ (SNP Constitution, 2012). National Council is held at least twice a year between conferences. It is comprised of two delegates from each branch, members of the National Executive Committee, six delegates from affiliated organisations (such as Young Scots for Independence), five MSPs, two MPs, one MEP, six councillors, and 15 members elected at conference. Finally, the National Executive Committee (NEC) is responsible for the “the strategic management and political direction of the Party” and the implementation of Conference and Council decisions.

However, two developments complicate this formally open decision-making procedure: the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the SNP’s move into government. The Scottish Government Cabinet and the Scottish Parliament group became new, influential centres of power in the party which disrupt the procedural democracy of the party. One long time SNP adviser explained:

> "You would've found that the political direction of the party would've been more based at the Scottish Parliament as of 1999. If you track forward more or less a decade after that to 2007, then the political direction of the SNP would have been to a significant extent been decided by the actual cabinet, not a shadow but a real administration" (Interview 53).

The strong leadership of senior SNP figures counterbalances official party democracy. Senior figures hold an informal persuasive role in the party. One example of the contradiction between procedural democracy and elite influence is the SNP's stance on NATO. The party's members hold this up as a case of ultimate democracy, since it engendered a lively conference debate. However, the debate was heavily influenced by the role of prominent party members, notably then-Westminster leader Angus Robertson. Robertson "is a spokesperson on both of those issues so clearly his opinion comes with that weight. But it was very much a case of having to convince the membership of the virtue of doing that" (Interview 38).

Ideas pushed by the SNP membership do get traction in SNP policy choices. One such policy is the trial of universal basic income. The SNP's conference passed a resolution supporting citizen's income in 2016 (Gollan, 2018). The Scottish Government committed to researching the policy in its 2017/18 Programme for Government and funded limited trials of the policy in December 2017 (Denholm, 2017; Brooks, 2017). However, these policies *already fit* with the social democratic stances of party leadership. Furthermore, implementation has been cautious.

Participative politics in the SNP is thus constrained by centralized leadership. The transition to government made leadership coordination and centralization more necessary. One former SNP senior adviser explained this transition:

> "Whereas before there didn't have to be nearly as much consideration around alignment of activities between Westminster and the SG, there now had to be…That was part and parcel of what I would describe as the professionalization of the SNP over the last decade. There was an

> incredible amount of coordination, cooperation, and occasionally heated discussion between different groups" (Interview 38).

The concentration and coordination of information between the Scottish Government, Westminster and Holyrood means that elected members have an advantage in intra-party debates and can guide members' opinions.

The coordination of information and power in the SNP resides in three main venues: the Scottish Government and its special advisers, Scottish Parliament whips and senior staff, and Westminster leadership team and senior staff. Senior staff in these venues and the European Parliament join a weekly call on Mondays, which sets out the priorities and issues for the week ahead. This 'coordination call' highlights how governing responsibility has empowered more elite actors in the SNP. Party growth and governing power necessitates a new, unwritten process of decision making. This process "isn't written anywhere and tends to be concentrated between the people who are in leadership positions" (Interview 41).

The call is seen as a major moment to set the tone of SNP behaviour in elected and public office:

> "That just sets the tone and the working pace for the week ahead. It's a real moment in the week because you know if you miss that call, you've got a lot of catch up to do because there's a lot of stuff discussed and agreed on it" (Interview 46).

Notably and importantly for this research, the European Parliament team is also included in this coordination call. However, respondents did not note that the EP group was central to the coordination of decision making. Rather, the Scottish Government is the hub for decisions. The Government have taken on a leading role in Brexit negotiations, with Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations Michael Russell being seen as the 'Brexit Minister.'

While SNP elites profess a democratic decision-making process, the parties' agenda and strategic decisions are often taken at a much higher level. This level is populated with the SNP's elected members and long-time staff, who influence party decision making through the coordination and concentration of information. A lack of open-ness to new information or information from the SNP's periphery means that transnational information may not be considered in decision making processes.

For example, when SNP members go abroad, the follow-up communication of their experiences to the SNP's central decision makers is not always direct. As one respondent explained:

> "There's no process for it. It's up to you as an individual to think how you would get that out there. I'm trying to do that better with Mike…Just trying to build that stronger relationship there so that everybody is aware of what's going on" (Interview 43).

Respondents also noted the distance between Brussels-based SNP actors and the SNP's decision making. One senior staffer explained: "From a very narrow legislative sense it doesn't have much of a day to day bearing. Not much is considered there which is going have an instant political effect here" (Interview 41). SNP members of the European Parliament have "quite a free reign" to act at the European Parliament (Interview 46). MEP's are trusted to know SNP policy, because "they know what the link back home is or what the link to Westminster is" (Interview 46). There are very few times when MEPs voted against the advice of the central party. However, on the Canadian Free Trade deal (CETA), MEPs defied advice from Holyrood colleagues, showing their ability to act independently in the EP (Interview 40).

The SNP's centralized nature makes it less likely to develop learning as a collective party. Individual actors and members who have links to transnational partners may not be in the central decision making structures. Furthermore, the informal and opaque nature of those centralized decision making processes

means that there is no clear process for reporting back transnational experiences to those who make key policy making decisions. Information is thus likely to be acquired by individuals, but not transferred to the party collectively.

(3) Key Entrepreneurs

MEPs are the individuals in the SNP who are most involved in EFA business, but the SNP has many individuals with interests across Europe. While the party is centralized in its decision making in Scotland, its European relationships are diffuse. Respondents repeatedly noted that the SNP's MEPs were the most active people in the European Free Alliance relationship. MEPs were also seen as having a lot of individual initiative and free reign, not only from their SNP colleagues but from EFA and Green colleagues. One senior staffer who had worked in Brussels noted that the proximity of the MEPs meant that "[The EFA-Green group] functions like one team. When it comes down to the detail of policy, it does tend to become each member for their own portfolio" (Interview 46). This independence from both the home party and the EFA group means that information is unlikely to flow from the SNP's two MEPs to the party's central decision making in Edinburgh.

MEPs' independent role in guiding policy and networking at the EU dates back to Winnie Ewing, MEP from 1975 to 1999. Ewing was President of the SNP from 1987 to 2004; notably she was succeeded in this role by current MEP Ian Hudghton. Before the creation of the EFA AEP Group in 1999, Ewing sat with other European political groupings. In 1984, she sat in the "European Democratic Alliance group…comprised of French Gaullists, the Irish Fianna Fail, and Ewing" (Laible, 2008: 163). This choice highlights her promotion of Scotland not as just a region but as a possible new state in Europe. The SNP's early choice of a TNP with statewide parties was a precursor of the distance

the SNP has from EFA parties today, which will be explored in section III of this chapter.

In addition to MEPs, the SNP also has many other elected members who foster international relationships. Some individuals are empowered by institutions at the European Union. For example, Christina McKelvie MSP is Scotland's representative on the Council of Europe, while Mairi Gougeon MSP is the representative on the Committee of the Regions. These opportunities often require politicians to take their own initiatives. Gougeon argued that access to the EU's institution should be more widely advertised, because, "if we're contributing to these organisations, everyone should be more aware of what they do or the opportunities that exist." McKelvie's international outlook predated her time in the Scottish Parliament. She explained, "Being in the trade union movement you get really involved in what's happening in other countries and you also get involved in what's happening from an international perspective." SNP members draw on both their previous experiences and their ability to access institutional opportunities to develop an international outlook and profile.

Other individual elected members have developed relationships with specific regions or countries. One example is former MP George Kerevan, who was instrumental in setting up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Catalonia in the UK Parliament. He has since written a book about the Catalan independence movement. Kerevan's interest in Catalonia pre-dates his involvement with the SNP; he began visiting Catalonia in 1974 (Argemi, 2017).

Another is former MSP and Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick who has become an outspoken advocate for Catalan self-determination. After being invited by the International Commission of European Citizens, Marwick spoke at the official rally the night before Catalonia's 1 October 2017 referendum and spent the day in a polling station during the referendum. This experience instigated

numerous further visits, for the December 2017 elections, and a year later to mark the anniversary of the referendum. Marwick's story shows the power of individual SNP elites' relationships with Catalonia. There are numerous other individual SNP members with similar stories.

The diffusion of entrepreneurship in the SNP on European issues suggests that party members are interacting with EFA partners, but these interactions are not tied clearly into the SNP as a collective party. This may hinder the transition from individual to collective understandings of transnational information.

(4) Issue Contestation

The SNP's leaders and members display a surprising amount of agreement on policy issues, despite its membership increase and the party's 'failure' in the 2014 independence referendum. This can partly be explained by the nature of the referendum, which did not center entirely on the right to self-determination. Rather it was about what Mitchell called "the Scottish Question" which included arguments from both sides about "the kind of state and society people envisaged for Scotland" (2015: 90). The SNP developed a detailed plan for a post-independence Scotland, most obviously in the government-published White Paper, which influenced their campaigning during the referendum. As such, new members who joined the party generally supported the SNP's policy platform beyond independence.

The biggest issue of contestation in recent years has been the discussion around a second independence referendum. One MSP argued that the party membership surge led to a friction in the party between "those who just want another referendum right away and those who generally have been party members for years and years and years and I think quite importantly, have tasted failure. I think that makes a difference. They're much more cautious" (Interview 51). Despite the First Minister's announcement of a draft bill for a second independence referendum, the issue is one which continues to be

shifted further into the future. The announcement appeased the newer membership and linked Brexit with independence. However, the SNP has continued to make only vague commitments to a second referendum (Cairney, 2016; Thomson, 2016).

One senior member of staff explained, “I think you just need to keep laying on the realism for people which is that it’s not holding a referendum that gets you independence. Winning a referendum gets you independence. That’s where you have to remind people that we’re not there yet” (Interview 52). In some sense, the biggest issues of conversation in the SNP are organizational, especially after the membership surge. As one long-time member explained, “the nature of groups and organisations at a voluntary level is that most of the arguments we have are about party structures, the constitution” (Interview 51).

The Brexit referendum has further narrowed the scope of the SNP’s policy development. Brexit allowed the SNP, through the Scottish Government and its MPs at Westminster, to emphasize the importance (and neglect) of Scotland’s voice in the UK. One longtime party member and senior staffer explained:

> “The biggest political event that has happened in my time in politics has been Brexit…I guess the reason [the independence referendum] was never as huge a challenge is that the electorate voted for the status quo. Although we keep making the arguments and we keep doing the research, there’s not the mess that we have now with Brexit” (Interview 46).

Brexit provides a policy challenge and focus for advisers behind the scenes in the SNP; it was predominant in the discussions I had with interview respondents. As one staff member said of Brexit: “it’s the only game in town” (Interview 52). This focus on Brexit reduces issue contestation because the SNP is united in its stance on Brexit and the Brexit agenda is centrally controlled. As such, other than Brexit, the SNP’s policy development is fairly centered at the government and on existing commitments. This lack of

contestation within the SNP also reduces the need for elected members to seek solutions outside of Scotland.

The SNP's electoral success and power in the EFA network, its control and use of government resources internationally, and lack of issue contestation reduce the likelihood that the party will seek solutions within the EFA network. Furthermore, although many SNP members are internationally active, this activity is often diffuse and disconnected from the centralized bodies of the party. This suggests a disconnect between transnational interactions and the decisions taken in the party's Edinburgh center.

7.3 Transnational Interactions

The SNP's transnational interactions differ significantly from those of other parties. While members of other parties referred to many EFA partners, this is not the case for members of the SNP. Respondents focused on three main groups of partners: geographically proximate parties (Plaid Cymru and Irish parties), powerful parties (mostly Catalan), and social democratic statewide (non-EFA) parties. Members of the SNP show significantly less investment in the European Free Alliance network than their Catalan, Breton or Frisian counterparts. One senior member of the European Free Alliance explained:

> "The Scots only joined in 1989. And Winnie Ewing was [in the European Parliament] before EFA was founded, since 1974…there is a very close relationship between France and Scotland. That's why Madame Ecosse joined the Gaullists and why they had a very hard time to convince her in the end to join EFA. That was mainly due to changing situations in France and Scotland, rather than that EFA has become more attractive" (Interview 10).

The SNP often falls outside the centre of the EFA network, despite its centrality in other EFA parties' conceptions of successful nationalist and regionalist activism. For example, SNP leaders are "not in attendance at a lot of EFA conferences. They send their staff" (Interview 45). As one Westminster SNP

staffer explained, “[EFA parties are] not sister parties; they’re simply the group we choose to associate with in the European Parliament” (Interview 41).

On the other hand, some elected members explained that the European Free Alliance had a role in initiating their relationships with Catalonia. One explained that, ten years prior, “I went to the EFA youth conference that took place in Barcelona…It was a real eye-opening experience” (Interview 39). Another MSP recalled that EFA had invited her to her first visit to Barcelona, and that this had begun a 20-year and counting relationship with some Catalan politicians (who were youth activists on her first visit) (Interview 51).

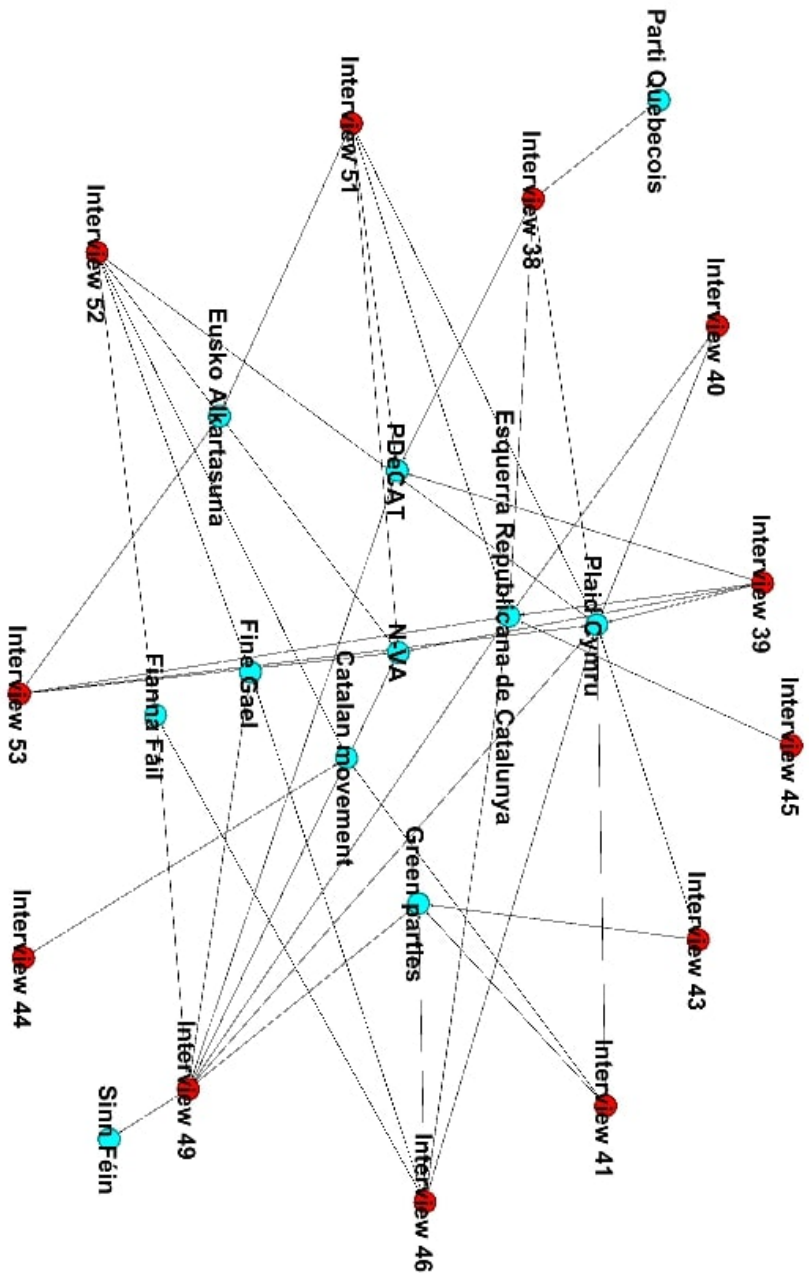
Another noted: “it’s through [EFA] that most of the contacts were made” early on in the SNP’s growth (Interview 53). These respondents reported very few *subsequent* interactions with EFA. The European Free Alliance may have brought SNP members initially into contact with Catalonia, but they quickly built bilateral relationships, particularly with powerful parties.

(1) Network Visualization

As Figure 7.1 shows, the SNP has a limited number of relationships with other political parties in EFA. Within these relationships, Plaid Cymru and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya are the most commonly mentioned parties. I will explore these relationships in the next section. Respondents also mention ERC’s Catalan Government partner, PDeCAT and more generally, the “Catalan movement.” This conflation of the Catalan independentist parties reveals a lack of information among SNP respondents about the politics of Catalan independence.

The visualization also shows the peripheral nature of relationships with the Parti Quebecois and Sinn Fein and Eusko Alkartasuna (EA). Notably, one of the mentions of EA drew on interactions with Basque activists *in Catalonia*. This further highlights the primacy of the Catalan-Scottish link in the SNP’s network.

Figure 7.1: SNP Transnational Relationships Visualization



Finally, I have included three statewide political parties. The SNP's relationship with the two main Irish political parties (Fine Gael and Fianna Fail) will be addressed further in section V, which explores the SNP's use of governmental

resources. Individuals also noted interactions with European green parties from various countries. These relationships were in each case individual

interactions. No cross-party trend emerged. However, it is interesting to note that EFA's relationship with the European Green Party in the European Parliament may have engendered some interactions with Greens for the SNP.

(2) Key Partners

The SNP's closest international partners fall into two categories: those with power and those that are geographically in proximity. The former category includes Catalan parties and to a lesser extent the N-VA in Flanders and the Parti Québécois in Quebec. They also seek powerful connections by having relationships with state-wide parties. The proximate group is dominated by the relationship between the SNP and Plaid Cymru, although some links exist with Irish mainstream parties and Sinn Fein.

Proximate Parties

Plaid Cymru is repeatedly referred to by SNP respondents as the SNP's "sister party" and as set apart from other parties in EFA. As one former Westminster staff member explained: "Further across Europe, I'm aware of a few things that aren't really cooperation in the sense that it is with Plaid" (Interview 41). The relationships between the SNP and Plaid are extensive and personal, with one respondent asking whether the party's cooperation is "as much sentimental as it is meaningful" (Interview 52). This relationship is also rooted in the shared problems faced in relation to the UK Government.

Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans is the closest partner of SNP MEPs; one respondent described this relationship as "natural" (Interview 46, Interview 40). One SNP European Parliament staff member explained that Evans and SNP MEPs have the same issues: "we're being totally ignored. We've got devolved

Parliaments, but we're disenfranchised…Jill also believes that Wales would do a lot better as an independent nation" (Interview 40).

The SNP's relationship with Plaid Cymru was established not in EFA, but domestically. The parties were founded around the same time (1934 for the SNP; 1925 for Plaid Cymru). Both began to establish a more permanent representation in the UK's House of Commons in the 1970s; at that time, "the leader of each party refers to the other as his party's closest ally" (Fusaro, 1979: 365). The Parliamentary groups also met weekly during this time. These close Westminster connections between the parties have continued, even with the sudden growth of the SNP's Parliamentary group in 2015. Over many years, the Plaid-SNP relationship has become "part of the scenery" of nationalist and regionalist politics in the UK (Interview 52).

In the UK Parliament, there is an institutional incentive for partnership between the parties. One senior Westminster SNP staff member explained:

> "As a numeric thing, the way Parliament works, we can assist them with getting debates or question sessions…We get guaranteed times in debates, so we ask, in a debate on the Swansea tidal lagoon, what do you want us to say? Really, the SNP does not and should not have a position on the Swansea tidal lagoon. As our sister party, we make the points for them" (Interview 41).

Plaid Cymru and the SNP also have close links at the level of their regional leaders. It was noted by multiple respondents that former Plaid Cymru leader and SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon had a close friendship and affinity for one another. Plaid Cymru's new leader, Adam Price, attended the SNP conference in October 2018 and delivered the traditional Plaid Cymru 'Fraternal Address.' He also met and talked with Sturgeon after the speech (Interview 52).

There is reason to suspect that relationships between the SNP and Plaid will be as close as ever with Price as leader. Price previously worked closely with SNP MPs Angus Robertson and Stewart Hosie when they all sat as MPs. He has hired Robertson to lead a review of Plaid Cymru's campaign structures

(Mairs, October 2018). This choice highlights the role that the SNP takes in 'teaching' party professionalization in the broader EFA network (further discussed in section IV). It also emphasizes the power differential between the two. One SNP insider explained, "Plaid are still where we were 20 years ago" (Interview 52).

This relationship has been complicated since Brexit. The SNP's transnational relations in government often progress differently than its role as a political party. Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister has different relationships than in her role as party leader. Brexit and Scottish relations with Wales exemplify this. As First Minister, Sturgeon has come together with the Labour government in Wales. Brexit has led to "closer working relationships governmentally and politically with the Welsh Government than we have ever had" (Interview 49). This relationship is challenging for Plaid Cymru given their simultaneous opposition to Welsh Labour and closeness with the SNP. To ease this difficulty, the SNP seeks to 'give a heads up' to Plaid Cymru alongside discussions with Welsh Labour. Furthermore, "the political aspirations we have, and Plaid have, are still tied together" (Interview 49).

Finally, there are also membership links between Plaid Cymru and the SNP. For example, one respondent explained, "if you're an SNP member, you can be a Plaid member because obviously the two parties only operate in their respective countries so we would never be challenging each other. Even at SNP conference, you will find now and again there will be some Plaid members, there might be a Plaid delegation" (Interview 46). In the run up the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, large groups of Plaid activists came to Scotland to help campaign. One Plaid member explained that the relationship between Plaid Cymru and the SNP particularly "reached its apogee during the independence referendum when there were hordes of Plaid Cymru

members in Scotland."[18] The referendum provided the party an opportunity to make arguments for Welsh autonomy and to motivate its membership. As Leanne Wood said at the time, "If Scotland votes yes, the genie is out of the bottle" (Bennhold, 2017).

The Brexit vote in 2016 motivated relationships between the SNP and political parties in the Republic of Ireland. One senior SNP staff member explained, "As a party of government we see ourselves much more interested in Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil who are the Irish leaders. The two of them are battling it out constantly to be in the Irish Government. It makes more sense for us to be at that level" (Interview 46). The choice to work with Irish governing parties thus reflects the SNP's position in government and access to relationships through institutions such as the British-Irish Council.

Relationships with both the two leading Irish political parties and the Irish Government allow the SNP to have conversations on two different tracks: institutionally and more informally. One senior staffer explained that when SNP MPs Ian Blackford and Stephen Gethins visited Ireland, "there were conversations that were at the political level that it wasn't quite right for the government ministers to have…That's all Brexit related. Brexit has been really good for our relationship with the Irish" (Interview 49). SNP political leaders thus met both with Irish Government officials and, on a political basis, with Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

On the other hand, the SNP has always had a cautious relationship with Sinn Fein. Multiple respondents noted that SNP MEPs objects to EFA parties' relationships with Sinn Fein; one noted that an SNP MEP threatened to leave EFA if Sinn Fein became involved (Interview 21, Interview 10). One EFA staffer explained: "We have been told--'politically we are fine with Sinn Fein, but publicly we cannot say it. Because if in the North of Ireland something happens

[18] Interview done during MSc research (2015).

or some of our members ask how we are dealing with 'terrorists'" (Interview 10).

In the SNP, the caution around having a relationship with Sinn Fein stems back to the time of Winnie Ewing. One respondent explained: "The SNP has really molded its European body since Winnie's time in Europe. And you have to appreciate the fact that Sinn Fein in Winnie's time was not something that you wanted to be affiliated with" (Interview 46). Another respondent explained that Sinn Fein was "not chapping at the door" to speak to the SNP (Interview 52).

However, through institutional contacts, the parties engaged positively. A senior SNP adviser explained:

> "We had very good relationships with Martin McGuinness, particularly around these UK wide gatherings so British-Irish Councils and Joint Ministerial Committees. We would tend to be coming from a very similar place…When Michelle O'Neill took over, we definitely called to congratulate…It's when they're not sitting, then there's a lot less" (Interview 49).

Institutional and political opportunities made the SNP more likely to engage with other political parties in both Wales and Northern Ireland. The Brexit vote also allowed the SNP to move beyond engagement with other autonomist parties and shifted the focus onto more intensive cooperation with statewide parties: Welsh Labour, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Powerful Parties

Outside of the fraternal relationships in the UK, there are three regionalist movements which are referred to by SNP respondents, with the most common being the Catalan independence parties and less frequently, Québécois and Flemish nationalist parties.

Catalan independentist parties' power (and rise in power) has affected the relationship with the SNP. One former senior SNP adviser explained that, during the 2014 independence referendum process, "the closest relationship

was clearly with the Catalan independence movement because it was mature" (Interview 38). The relationship between the SNP and Catalans is "multi-layered in that you have your MEP relationship, your Westminster one and your government one. You can have those relationships with slightly different parties" (Interview 49). In this section, I condense these varied interactions by discussing Catalan-Scottish relationships at membership, party and Parliamentary/governmental levels.

It is first important to consider whether the SNP leans towards a closer relationship with ERC or PDeCAT. As noted in Chapter Six, both parties reported relationships with the SNP. Some SNP respondents could not clearly differentiate between the two parties; they chose to generally discuss the Catalan 'movement' rather than party links. For more involved and prominent respondents, the Catalan parties' power affected the SNP's choice of partner.

A long time staff member explained that "originally [the relationship] was much more about Esquerra and then it became more about Artur Mas and Convergencia…the original relationship reflected where the SNP was at that time, which was much more leftist" (Interview 38). A senior adviser reported that SNP First Minister Alex Salmond had a good relationship with both Mas and previous leader of the CDC Jordi Pujol (Interview 49). Another senior respondent explained, "We tend to deal with who's dominant at the time…Esquerra is our formal partner but in practical effect, it varies" (Interview 49).

There is also a non-partisan Catalan-Scots civil society relationship, which incorporates members of ERC and the SNP. Two branches of the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) are based in Scotland. These branches were revived in the run up the Catalan referendum in April 2017. The ANC had previously been active in Scotland, but as one organiser explained: "it went into a hibernation period so there was no one here to actually work" (Interview 48).

After the Catalan referendum, members of the Scottish independence movement (including but beyond members of the SNP) also founded the Catalan Defence Committee.

Activists passionate about the Catalan cause can also be found at the membership level of the SNP. Then-SNP Youth Vice Convener Rory Steel told a journalist after the Catalan referendum, “The Scottish Government’s statement was welcome, but I don’t think it went far enough to condemn the actions of Madrid which are unacceptable. Activists in Scotland and Catalonia feed off each other’s energy” (McQuade, 2017). An SNP councillor added, “When the Catalan referendum was announced, we were very slow to support it. Because it was happening illegally, and we knew it was happening illegally, and because of our concerns over the Spanish veto” (Interview 45). To some extent, the bottom up, activist-level relationships between Scottish and Catalan independentists pushed the more elite levels of the SNP to be more vocal about Catalonia.

At a party level, one former adviser explained, the SNP and ERC are each other’s closest partners; they argued that ERC sees the SNP “as a mirror of themselves” (Interview 53). Another staffer with experience working in Brussels explained that the relationship is facilitated by the European Free Alliance. They said: “The bread and butter of the relationship [with Catalonia] is in Brussels because we sit with EFA” (Interview 46). Another corroborated the importance of SNP MEPs in Brussels: “There’s always been an SNP-Catalan party relationship, depending on how the parties are behaving. A lot of that was managed through Brussels” (Interview 49).

At a Parliamentary level, individual SNP MPs and MSPs have expressed interest in the Catalan process. For example, SNP MSP Sandra White visited Catalonia numerous times alongside former SNP Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick. Marwick also addressed the official Catalan independentist rally on

the night before the referendum. Former SNP MP George Kerevan was instrumental in setting up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Catalonia in the UK Parliament.

MSP Mairi Gougeon explained that in her role on the Committee of the Regions, “the priority has been keeping Catalonia on the agenda because now they don’t have a representative at the Committee of the Regions so who else is going to fight that battle?...I think that is our responsibility to keep that on the agenda.” One respondent argued that this supportive relationship between Catalan and SNP politicians was too symbolic and that they need to have more of a “working relationship” rather than one focused on photo opportunities (Interview 42).

The Scottish Government and Catalan Government’s relationship provides space for further interaction, including on specific policy issues. Through Government channels, the SNP again speaks to both ERC and PDeCAT politicians, depending on who is in power. For example, the governmental relationship has been further solidified by a visit from Catalan President Quim Torra to Scotland in July 2018. Torra is an independent, who has more links to the left-wing of Catalan politics, including ERC. Although the meeting was ostensibly about self-determination, policy topics were prominent. One adviser explained, “They’re very focused on getting an economic connection and building on that…It was an attempt to take the formal relationship, which for the last couple of years has come about constitutional issues, back to something where it’s about culture and tourism and trade and investment and education” (Interview 49). For example, the Catalan Government has “a national investment bank and asked if we would like to come and see how they did it and so we can share learning” (Interview 49).

While there are close relationships, institutionally and at a more activist level, between the SNP and both Catalan parties, there are also barriers to the

relationship. For example, the Scottish and Catalan referendums hindered interaction because parties were more focused on domestic concerns and gaining states' support. As one adviser explained, "I don't think we ever met Puigdemont before everything happened. We were busy, and they were busy. That was a sort of phase where it was kind of, 'you do your thing, we'll do our thing and they're different, but we'll hold each other's hands'" (Interview 49).

However, the Scottish Government and its minister's ability to interact with Catalan nationalists is constrained. The First Minister's restrained support for the Catalan referendum reflected the need to be 'diplomatic.' One respondent explained: "being at government level, that has to be diplomatic. As much as she was able to speak to the Catalan Government, she was also speaking to the Spanish Government because you're in government—you have to do that" (Interview 46). In addition to the most powerful members of EFA, the SNP, being in government, will also seek out more powerful, statewide parties which tempers their engagement even with their closest independentist allies.

Beyond the SNP, respondents reported limited relationships with the N-VA, but both noted that interactions were managed through EFA and Brussels (Interview 49, Interview 39). One staffer explained that the relationship with the N-VA was constrained by the fact that "they sit within the ECR group, which fair enough because it reflects their politics" (Interview 46). The N-VA's move to the ECR group, and meeting between the N-VA and then British Prime Minister David Cameron pushed the two parties further apart (Cerulus, 2013).

Respondents also reported that, in the run up to the 2014 referendum, the SNP looked to the Parti Québécois (PQ) as part of their preparation. Other than the SNP, the party had come closest to independence with the 1995 referendum. It was thus perceived as the most *successful* party and region from which to glean information. One senior adviser explained, "Although I'm very careful to draw parallels between Québécois nationalism and Scottish nationalism, the

process was probably as close to being the same as any one that we've had recently" (Interview 38). The SNP's interest in the Parti Québécois, which centres around the link between the Quebec referendums and the Scottish referendum, will be explored further in section IV.

Statewide Parties

As the introduction to this chapter emphasized, the SNP has long sought to act as a 'normal' country in Europe, placing Scotland among other EU member states and analogously, itself among statewide parties. The party has sought links with statewide parties, especially those with similar social democratic positioning. As one Breton respondent observed, "The idea of the SNP is to speak to states or parties in power. Not really parties with 50 members, who are a cultural minority" (Interview 14). One SNP adviser explained, "It's probably more the development of links with existing nation-states and the governments of nation-states that would've been the biggest effort we put in" (Interview 53).

The first group of statewide parties the SNP are close to is the European Greens. The SNP has an institutional link to these parties through the EFA-Greens group in the European Parliament. One senior SNP adviser explained, "In a lot of countries, the Greens would be our natural allies, in quite a lot of Nordic countries. We would have connections, again a lot of them through the European Parliament" (Interview 49). Relationships with Green MEPs also surround specific shared policy issues. One former SNP EP staffer explained that the Greens work on many interests that align with those in the SNP including LGBT and women's equalities or rural affairs (Interview 46).

Beyond the EP, the SNP has systematically reached out to mainstream statewide political parties in Europe. This was spurred by Brexit, after which "there was an increased international interest in Scotland's position" (Interview 41). Some examples of this engagement are former Westminster leader Angus

Robertson's speech at the German Social Democratic Party conference and Europe Spokesperson and MP Stephen Gethins' visit to Madrid, where he spoke with members from all parties.

These meetings all follow a similar structure:

> "It's just about making them understand what the SNP is about. They have these perceptions, these beliefs that they've picked up through their own conversations and ongoing assumptions about the SNP… It's quite interesting that the meeting has a process—you start by setting out what the SNP is, what it's political priorities and political goals are as a left of centre social democrat party, and with some of them you actually do start to see the penny drop…Almost like an education type process" (Interview 46).

This process is similar to Catalan independentists' post-referendum process of explaining which again emphasizes the role of seeking international recognition for these more advanced nationalist parties. However, access to statewide parties is more difficult than in the SNP's relationships to regionalist and nationalist partners. This difficulty engenders the 'education' approach. One Scottish nationalist journalist who writes about the SNP explained, "You've got a lot of regions across Europe with an interest and a real passion for Scottish developments, not reciprocated. Then you have this Scottish nationalist love affair with Oslo and Stockholm and Copenhagen which is not developed" (Interview 50).

Unlike with the Catalan referendum, Brexit has provided openings for the SNP to engage with high level politicians in Europe (Brown, 2016). As noted in the previous section on 'proximate parties,' the SNP also used the Brexit issue to gain access to Irish statewide parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. The SNP's promotion of remaining in the EU, and subsequent push for a 'soft' Brexit have given it significant common ground with Irish statewide parties. However, these relationships are relatively recent and focus on a collaborative approach to the Brexit issue rather than a 'learning' exchange of information.

(3) Barriers

The SNP's power in Scotland and domestic success has made it more likely that the party will work with powerful parties, just as we saw in the last chapter was true for Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya. However, in contrast to ERC, the SNP has not continued to interact with other, smaller EFA parties. Where ERC is a visible leader in EFA, the SNP is not. One Breton respondent noted, "Esquerra had already worked enormously in EFA, especially with Jordi Sole…Catalan MEPs are a motor in EFA, and well, I haven't often seen Alyn Smith" (Interview 14). Another explained:

> "The SNP seem to be in a position of non-engagement…[other regionalists] want a story of something imminent, something's about to change in Scotland. They want this to shake up the EU's ambivalence about sub-state independence movements. This will set a precedent…that would be a reason for SNP non-engagement because they don't want to do that" (Interview 50).

SNP non-engagement is related to their perception of EFA as a non-influential group in the European context. Furthermore, SNP respondents also have suspicions that some EFA members would be potentially reputation damaging. These two perceptions lead to the creation of barriers to interaction between the SNP and other EFA members.

The European Free Alliance is perceived as a 'fringe' political movement by the SNP. One respondent explained, "If we would have our pick of European parties to join, it wouldn't be EFA because they don't have a big seat at the table. They don't have much influence" (Interview 45). A senior SNP adviser said, "if you go back ten years or so, we very much became the poster boy for EFA…Not forgetting our own history here, but a lot of them are very fringe parties" (Interview 52).

The SNP's feeling that EFA is not influential leads it to seek other routes to lobby the EU. For example, SNP elected members work to be influential in institutions like the Committee of the Regions and Council of Europe, elected

members developed a programme of engagement to reach out to Europe's state-wide parties, and the SNP-led Scottish Government practices significant para-diplomacy.

In addition to EFA's fringe status in the wider context of the EU, the SNP views some other EFA parties as potentially damaging due to their right wing, peripheral stances. One staffer explained, "From time to time we've had to almost be excusing things that were said by other parties or indeed put a block on some parties getting membership of EFA or threatening to leave if certain groups were involved" (Interview 52). There is also a perception that in some of these regions, like South Tyrol, "it's very ethnically based. On the face of it, very much about improving the lives of people but only if they were born there" (Interview 45). These smaller, more radical parties are an issue for the SNP as the party has worked to develop their 'competence' strategy and image. One elected member explained:

> "When it gets to the level of the Cornish independence parties or some of the smaller political parties…it becomes an issue of having that legitimacy. The SNP have gone from being a party of protest who have now developed into being a party of government. Do they de-legitimize themselves by acknowledging or supporting the campaigns of other political parties who, in many cases, aren't even pro- independence?" (Interview 39).

Even with Catalan partners, it is important for SNP elected members that Catalonia and Scotland are not conflated. One MSP explained, "People tend to lump Scotland and Catalonia together when we are two completely different situations. There's no avoiding that. I've tried to challenge that for years and it always continues" (Interview 43).

The SNP also puts up barriers to engagement with non-EFA far right parties, such as the 5 Star Movement. One source explained, "We said: you're anti-immigrant, anti-EU and you are essentially hiding far right tendencies under a

social platform. So, you don't get a meeting because some of what you're doing we think is despicable" (Interview 49).

Among all the parties I have studied in this thesis, the SNP has the most limited relationships in the European Free Alliance. The SNP's lack of relationships and boundaries in EFA limit their interactions with other nationalists and regionalists. As I have posited, interactions should provide a precursor for learning and thus it is likely that the SNP will not learn from EFA partners. However, they may acquire information from those social democratic parties and state-wide parties that they have sought relationships with.

7.4 Learning in the Scottish National Party

As the last section showed, the SNP sees itself as different and distant from the European Free Alliance. As one respondent explained:

> "It's been very arm's length in terms of our involvement here and indeed the involvement generally across the party, because it's kind of an 'over there' thing. Other than them having a few representatives coming along to our conference or funding the occasional meeting or trips over to the European Parliament, it is a very peripheral notion" (Interview 52).

As such, EFA is not central to the SNP's decision making processes. EFA's most meaningful connections in the SNP come through elected members with interests in the European Parliament or the Scots-Catalan relationship. Given their limited interactions in EFA, the SNP does not show any cases of learning from an EFA partner. One barrier to learning is the SNP's distance from EFA partners, which was addressed in the previous section. At the end of this section, I propose a barrier to collective interpretation, which stems from the SNP's diffuse transnational relationships and centralized decision-making process.

Before discussing the lack of learning from the European Free Alliance, however, I highlight ways that the SNP does learn from non-EFA examples: the Nordic countries and Quebec. The SNP also seeks to teach other regions

and parties about professionalization. These processes show that when political parties have access to broader sources of information, they move beyond party-to-party learning in EFA and learn from different sources and in more complex ways (through governing institutions, direct contact with other political actors).

(1) Learning and Emulation: The Nordic Model

Scottish politics is replete with references to Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. Historians have documented not only Scotland's long-past historical links to Nordic countries, but also its recent history of situating devolved Scottish politics in the Nordic sphere (Newby, 2009). The design of Scotland's more consensual Parliament explicitly took Westminster as a 'negative template' and the German and Scandinavian models as positive examples (Arter, 2004; Mitchell, 2000: 616).

The Scottish National Party has particularly adopted Nordic countries as models for their policy choices. Newby argues that the Nordic exemplar was drawn on in the post-2007 SNP administration with proposals such as a 'Norwegian-style' oil fund and a shared power grid (2009: 320-322). The SNP's proposal for an independent Scotland (Scotland's Future, otherwise known as The White Paper) has 42 mentions of Norway, 31 mentions of Denmark, 32 of Sweden, and 24 of Finland. Compared to 12 references to Germany and 9 to France, it is clear that the Nordic countries form a significant part of the conceptualization of an independent Scotland.

However, as discussed in Chapter Six with ERC, the conceptualization of the 'Nordic model' resembles a process of idealization and emulation. After the financial crisis, the SNP's social justice policy documents excised Ireland and Iceland as examples which "gives a monopoly to the core Nordic countries, though no analysis is offered of the reasons for their superior record on poverty and inequality" (Maxwell, 2009: 129). Maxwell here suggests that policy models

are chosen not necessarily through ‘analysis’ but rather that, like ERC, there is a certain amount of symbolic and emulative attachment to the Nordic model for the SNP. Generally, Nordic countries have offered an ideational ‘utopia’ model for many on the political left. As one historical overview of this phenomenon noted, even those in the centre or right “people have found what they were looking for in the Swedish model” (Andersson and Hilson, 2009: 221).

Although the SNP’s documents show little analysis, Maxwell also notes that the three elements of their social policy reflect Norwegian experience. He explains: “Though no attribution is offered, these three elements – early intervention to support and engage the most vulnerable from a baseline of high-quality universal services – could serve as a summary of the best practice in the Nordic welfare states” (2009: 129). In a November 2017 press release, the party trumpeted a newly released Scottish Government policy for working with Baltic and Nordic countries. The press release included 11 policies on which Scotland was engaging with from Baltic and Nordic countries, including the Finnish baby box. However, many of these policies were still in their early stages and were based more in the government than in the party. However, there is some evidence that the SNP does learn from Nordic governments and administrations.

I will touch on the cases of the Glasgow City architect, Finnish baby box, and Norwegian renewables policies. It is important to distinguish these cases from my proposed party-to-party learning model. The party uses information from and access to governing institutions to learn from Nordic examples. I take two examples of this: the development of the SNP’s Glasgow City Council manifesto and the promotion of the baby box policy.

In the development of the SNP’s Glasgow City Council manifesto in 2017, SNP Leader and now Glasgow City Council Leader Susan Aitken and deputy leader David McDonald travelled to Copenhagen. One example of a policy adopted

after this visit is the proposal of a 'City Architect.' The councillors met with Copenhagen's architect and decided to develop 'a similar role' in Glasgow. McDonald explained, "The concept of a City Architect is one which many cities have introduced, but Copenhagen appears to have mastered…We want Glasgow to be a city for people, of people and by people. We want to see better use of buildings and public space" (Paterson, 2017). Another Glasgow City Councillor, Rhiannon Spear, explained the choice of drawing on Nordic examples. She noted: "It was kind of an organic thing. They're doing it well, let's write this into our manifesto." Learning is thus driven both by shared ideologies and a *perception of success* in another place.

In another case, the SNP adopted a policy of introducing a 'baby box' which was later implemented through its role in the Scottish Government. The party adopted the policy and explicitly compared it to the policy adopted in Finland (Carrell, 2016). Interestingly, in the process of implementing this policy, the party (through its Government connections) has built relationships with Finland. As one senior SNP adviser in the explained:

> "You get some [relationships] through policies. We have much better relationships with the Finns because we borrowed the baby box. You build connections in new ways. If you go back ten to twelve years, our international connections were who we could make friends with in the European Parliament…now, it's much easier for people to engage with us" (Interview 49).

This quote is indicative of the way that political parties use governing resources to build transnational connections. The adviser notes that previously the party only had political links (through the EP) but *governing responsibility* has allowed for new routes to transnational relations (consequently reducing the importance of the EP). As I suggest in Section V, this linkage requires more specific research.

Another similar example is that "a lot of the low carbon policies we look at and steal from Norway, but you adapt it all for Scotland's situation. Nothing can be

straight lifted and dropped in. Roseanna Cunningham is in Norway now looking at electric vehicles and how they've incentivized the use of electric vehicles" (Interview 49). In their aforementioned November 2017 press release, the SNP also noted that they were exploring "how we can learn from Norway's success on carbon capture and storage."

These examples of the city architect, baby box and Norwegian low carbon policies show processes of information acquisition and interpretation from other governments. These are not cases of *party* learning as set out in this thesis but rather cases in which the SNP (sometimes through roles in the Scottish Government) learns from information from other *states*. The SNP does not discuss specific Nordic parties, but rather speaks about the administrations and governments in various Nordic countries. Although the source of learning is a government, the 'learner' is still the SNP. The adoption of Nordic policies in the Scottish Government is encouraged by SNP politicians and advisers and follows from SNP manifestos. Policy learning also occurs contemporaneously to the party's political usages of the 'Nordic' as a symbol.

The SNP's and Scottish Government's use of information from international administrations highlights that *electorally successful* parties can access information beyond the EFA network. The SNP has access to many institutional forums (the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, the Council of Europe). Future research and adaptation of the party learning framework should further account for the way that parties may access varied *sources* of learning beyond political parties.

(2) Learning: 'An Inverse Lesson'

The SNP's interest in Quebec stems from Parti Québécois success in the 1990s and the 1995 referendum, which the Quebec nationalist movement narrowly lost. In 1995, then leader of the SNP and MP Alex Salmond attended a briefing held by the Quebec delegation in London, during the time that the

Quebec government as led by the PQ. One reporter recalled that he and Salmond had a conversation that "was nothing short of a forensic interrogation" (Murray, 2014).

However, a 2013 visit by PQ premier Pauline Marois was downplayed by the SNP; then First Minister Alex Salmond avoided a joint press conference (Carrell, 2013). Salmond and Mike Russell (now 'Brexit Minister') also later had an informal meeting with PQ deputy premier Bernard Landry (Torrance, 2012: 26). However, the SNP's skittishness about being seen talking to the PQ did not go unnoticed in Canada. One Toronto Sun report said derisively, "Pauline Marois went on an official mission to Scotland in January 2013 to build bridges, ready to wear a tartan skirt while Scottish separatist leaders didn't want to be associated with two-time losers" (Duhaime, 2014). Despite this, the PQ remained interested in the Scottish process. During the 2014 referendum, Québécois activists and experts came to Scotland including a large group of young activists funded by the PQ and PQ members of the National Assembly (Duhaime, 2014; Sherwell, 2014).

Despite the tensions and concern about the reputational effect of links with the PQ, the SNP did look to Quebec before the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. As the closely lost 1995 referendum indicated, "Quebec has been the market-leader among secessionists in advanced industrial democracies since the 1970s" (Lynch, 2005: 507). In 2012, the SNP's then-Westminster leader Angus Robertson MP visited Quebec, along with advisers. They met with "people from all sides and no sides and academics" (Interview 38). Representatives of the anti-independence campaign Better Together and the UK Government also visited Quebec to do research (BBC, April 2012).

One senior adviser explained that the SNP concluded that there was an "inverse lesson from Quebec" on the issue of inclusion/exclusion of 'new Scots' (Interview 53). They explained: "the civic and inclusive approach is one that is

natural to the SNP, looking at examples like Quebec you can see why it's just wrong. It's just wrong anyway but it's wrong electorally as much as morally to not seek to be inclusive and civic" (Interview 53). The inclusive approach was seen as 'natural' to the SNP. Through their analysis of the PQ's choices, the SNP perceived that Quebec was a prime example of exclusivity's undesirability.

This lesson is based in the SNP's perceptions of the PQ's migration policies as overly exclusive. This perception is not necessarily accurate. Hepburn compared the SNP and PQ's policies on immigration and found that "the PQ has actively sought to court the immigrant vote in Quebec and encourage immigrant participation in the political process" (Hepburn, 2011: 516). However, she notes, the PQ has been less successful than the SNP in making immigrants and immigrant groups a central part of their party, unlike the SNP. Putting aside the 'accuracy question,' which will be addressed again in Chapter Eight, the SNP's avoidance of the PQ's immigration policies provides an example of how party learning can be a 'negative' lesson. The respondent acquired information on the PQ's different approach and interpreted it to be unsuccessful. This bolstered the SNP's existing policy position.

SNP respondents also noted strategic learning from the Québécois case. They found: "many of the same tactics were deployed although the issues might've been different…The key learnings were start early, build as broad of a base of support as possible, and the final note was extremely obvious but important: don't lose" (Interview 38). As this last lesson shows, the Québécois case has become a cautionary tale amongst SNP members since 2014. The oft-repeated wisdom is: look what can happen if you lose another referendum. This association has gone beyond the party as well. Analyses of the SNP's possible second referendum call on the Quebec concept of the 'neverendum' (Henley, 2014; Capurro, 2017). As McAngus (2016) noted, the party are "keen to avoid 'doing a Quebec.'"

Despite the regular contact, any mention of the Quebec case in the SNP comes alongside numerous qualifications that the two parties are significantly different. There have long been visible tensions between the SNP and their Québécois counterparts which led the SNP to perceive the PQ's example as negative. The interest in the Quebecois process paired with this perception led to an 'inverse' lesson.

(3) Teaching: Professionalization

Whereas the Catalan movement imparted information on political mobilization, members of the SNP see their main export to other EFA parties as their knowledge about professionalization. The SNP has long been seen as an example in the academic and political conversation around professionalization, given their use of updated campaigning methods and their organisational change over time (Lynch, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2012). As mentioned in the previous chapters, smaller parties of EFA have often referenced the SNP's campaigning strategies as a point of learning.

Campaign strategies have also been imparted by members of the SNP. For example, SNP Youth organised a workshop called "Aye: Campaign training session: Get Organised for Independence" for EFA and EFA Youth delegates. The training sessions included lessons on canvassing and imparting a political message. One SNP source involved in this workshop explained, "We have so much to teach and so much to give to EFA. I'd love to see it become more of a forum of sharing best practice…I think we need to accept that [EFA] is not going to influence large policy at a European level and therefore we should probably use it as a forum to talk to each other" (Interview 45).

Other SNP elected members spoke of different forums where they shared the Scottish experience of peaceful independentism internationally. One MSP explained, "I've always had an affinity towards Catalonia and spoke at a Catalan summer university on independence movements and peaceful

activism, which is always a nice topic to speak about when it comes to political activism" (Interview 44).

Another MSP had been involved in an anti-corruption programme in the Ukraine. They explained, "a lot of those people who took part in the project have all still stayed in touch anyway. And people who are just desperate to make a change and try and tackle a bit of that corruption. It was something that was tangible, that you feel like you contributed to and you can see a difference" (Interview 43). Another had met with representatives from different states in the Balkans about "our democratic structures" (Interview 51). As I noted earlier, Plaid Cymru has also hired former SNP campaign leader to review their campaign and organisational structures.

Professionalization and peaceful activism are two interlinked processes for the SNP. The party sees itself as a promoter and teacher of a 'normalization' of nationalist and regionalist parties. In numerous venues, including but not exclusive to EFA, elected members of the SNP 'teach' or 'export' their knowledge about party professionalization to other political parties.

(4) Barrier to Learning: Diffuse Learners, Centralized Decision Making

The SNP does not learn from EFA in any systematic way. This can partly be explained by their lack of connections across the EFA network (see section III). However, the SNP has intensive relationships with Plaid Cymru and the Catalans. The lack of learning from these parties can be explained by other barriers to learning in the SNP, which will be explored in this section and the next. The first barrier to learning is rooted in the organisational structure of the party. As noted in section II, the SNP is a *centralized* party. However, when looking at the key transnational entrepreneurs in the party, there are a wide variety of elected individuals with relationships across Europe (especially with Catalonia).

The diffusion of transnational entrepreneurship is clear in the SNP. Many transnationally active individuals have become active through their own interests or connections (for example, Angus Roberston and his German-language connections; Linda Fabiani MSP, Sandra White MSP and Tricia Marwick in Catalonia; former MSP Rob Gibson and his links to Brittany). As one MSP explained, "Probably everybody in this place has got a personal interest in some place in Europe. And political interest. And it's very nice if some of them come together and you can use that" (Interview 44).

However, one MSP who had long been involved in Brussels-based organisations emphasized the difficulty of discussing information abroad when back in Scotland. They noted:

> "What I've always found quite frustrating is you feel like you can't talk about it when you come back home…There is this perception that people just think you're on a jolly and that's what they accuse you of. You know: 'Oh yeah she's over there again, what's she actually doing'" (Interview 43).

There are not clear reporting structures within the SNP to share information about transnational activity once the member returns back to Scotland. Another transnationally active member explained that advocating for international standards on human rights required significant personal initiative. They explained:

> "It's taken me ten years of just pushing that forward, keep pushing it on, on universal rights and on individual topics…That process can be helpful. It feels frustrating at the time but actually when you do take the time to look back and say well that step needed to be taken before that step" (Interview 44).

Furthermore, in cases where the Scottish Government and other SNP elected members are working in the same regions or countries: "We will try to link that up. There's no formal structure for that, it just kind of happens informally between all those that do international relations" (Interview 49). These accounts show that information sharing across the SNP occurs through

personal relationships and individuals' advocacy. Even SNP Parliamentarians find that the process of sharing knowledge takes considerable initiative and perseverance.

The lack of formal information sharing processes hinder *collective* SNP learning. Literature on organisational learning emphasises the need for both a shared culture and organisational routines to encourage collective learning (Dodgson, 1993: 382). Organisational routines for learning (the rules, procedures, and strategies) are underdeveloped in the SNP's international relations apparatus. The informal nature of information sharing from transnational entrepreneurs makes it less likely that information *acquired* by an individual in the SNP will go on to be *interpreted or implemented collectively*. Learning, thus, is hindered by the lack of formal structure to channel information from transnationally active members to central decision makers.

(5) Barrier to Learning: Power in the Regionalist Network

Lack of learning can also be attributed to the SNP's perception that they are the most powerful party in the EFA network, above and beyond even their next most powerful counterpart ERC. As such, SNP respondents did not refer to Catalan partners as exemplary. The SNP sees itself as the 'big brother' in the relationship. One respondent explained, "I think we have kind of become the grandfather party that people are kind of looking up to, thinking: 'That would be good if we could have similar achievements'" (Interview 53).

Although ERC has begun to achieve similar levels of success, the Catalans, respondents added, were envious of the referendum process in the UK. The UK Government's acceptance of the referendum process was seen by Catalan parties as impossible in Spain. Furthermore, on both the SNP and ERC sides there was some acknowledgement that the SNP invested less in the parties' relationship with one another.

For example, the SNP Friends of Catalonia group was founded precisely to address imbalances in the relationship. During the 2014 referendum, an SNP respondent explained: “We had a kind of discussion that [ERC members] felt that Catalonia knew more about Scotland than people in Scotland knew about Catalonia. They asked, you know, how can we try and change that. How can we improve the relationships between two countries, but particularly between SNP and ERC?” (Interview 39).

One SNP senior adviser involved during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum explained that they felt the Catalan process was less developed than the Scottish one. For example:

> “We found that during the process of writing the White Paper that in particular in the case of Catalonia there were questions posed to them from people here saying—what is your policy on defence? And they didn’t have one…then again, their public wasn’t concerned about those things. Leave it to them to defend their policy or lack thereof. It might be more instructive for them to look to what happened in Scotland” (Interview 38).

Information exchange thus was more likely to flow from the SNP to Catalan partners rather than the other direction. One respondent described attending a Brussels event with Flemish, Catalan, Basque, Sinn Fein MEPs and yet, “they couldn’t really get anyone from Scotland…or any of the SNP hierarchy to attend and speak” (Interview 50).

The SNP thus often does not engage with even the most powerful of other regionalist parties. This stems from their feeling, as the quote above says, that ‘it might be more instructive for them to look to what happened in Scotland.’ Across my interviews, it was clear that the SNP sees itself as an exemplar in the nationalist and regionalist party network, and thus the party does not see seek out information from EFA partners.

In addition to the sense that other parties are more likely to look up to ‘big brother’ SNP, the SNP’s power in Scotland moderates their behaviour and

statements internationally. Being in government alters the likelihood that senior SNP politicians (now members of the Scottish Government) will engage with EFA parties. One respondent explained: We have this governmental responsibility to behave as a government. Part of becoming an independent country is demonstrating that we recognize international obligations and responsibilities and that we can be trusted in the world" (Interview 49). While individuals from the SNP might travel abroad, as a party, in an official capacity, the SNP is careful with engaging in the EFA network. As such, some SNP individuals might invest in EFA or EFA partners, but as a collective, the SNP is hindered by its power and success. The SNP's power leads them to learn from examples seen as more powerful or successful, whether that be the 'precedent' of Quebec or the 'utopia' model of the Nordic countries.

7.5 Scottish Institutional Diplomacy and Learning

Since the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and entering the Scottish Government in 2007, the SNP and its elites have used Scottish Government and Parliament resources to establish connections across Europe and the world more widely. Using the Scottish Government's reputation, one adviser explained:

> "We're able to meet with politicians in Germany that wouldn't want to meet the SNP. But they will meet the Scottish Government. Particularly post-Brexit, they very much wanted to meet with the Scottish Government. So, you have connections there that you wouldn't have. We now meet ministers from pretty much all the European countries" (Interview 49).

In this section, I consider how the SNP has mobilized through Scottish institutions to build transnational connections. I argue that these transnational linkages to other states are largely institutional rather than driven by the party, despite the SNP's efforts to capitalize on them. Nonetheless, *informational access* to statewide parties and governments provides new *sources* of learning for parties beyond the EFA transnational network.

(1) History of Scottish Diplomacy

Scottish diplomacy across Europe pre-dates the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Government. There has long been a Scottish presence in Brussels. Scotland Europa was opened in 1992 as a non-political, non-governmental office in Brussels. It still holds its reputation as a 'focal point' in Scots-EU relationship. As one respondent said, its central position on Rond-Point Schuman next to the European Commission building gives Scotland a central organizing space in Brussels (Interview 43; Rowe 2011: 178). In 1999, the then-Scottish Executive opened a representation in Brussels which became housed in that same central building as Scotland Europa, now branded as 'Scotland House' (Rowe, 2011: 178-180).

Scottish representations are now located across the world in Washington DC, Ottowa, Toronto, and Beijing. Scottish Development International (SDI), the international arm of the Scottish Government's enterprise agency Scottish Enterprise, has over 30 offices worldwide. These offices go beyond the European Union. For example, one former adviser explained: "The former First Minister and the current First Minister have put a lot of effort into fostering links with China… we try to sort of maximize Scotland's position and clout and presence on the international stage" (Interview 53).

Economic partnerships have been paired with cultural and social linkages to promote what the SNP's manifesto called a 'One Scotland' approach to international relations. For example, the Scottish First Minister has always been involved in the Tartan Day in the United States. This has now developed into an entire week of 'Scotland Week' celebrations in New York. The SNP-led Scottish Government also developed a Diaspora Engagement Strategy in 2010 to develop and maintain economic links with Scots abroad (Leith and Sim, 2016). These examples are part of a larger process of creating Scotland as a 'brand' (economically and culturally) internationally. The SNP's 2016 manifesto

noted that international outreach is a benefit to “trade, investment, travel, education and knowledge exchange” but also a way to “help to promote our values, including human rights” (p. 41).

In the cases thus far highlighted, the SNP’s diplomatic outreach was ‘by design’ but in some cases it was ‘by accident’ (Interview 53). One such accident was that Scotland’s power and profile on the international stage were no doubt enhanced by the Scottish Government’s choice to release Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Al-Megrahi in 2009. Interview respondents noted that this was a matter of law, yet in Scotland’s para-diplomatic journey the compassionate release also allowed the SNP Government “to articulate a distinctive Scottish identity with specific values of compassion and justice” (Kenealy, 2012: 569).

The prominence of the independence referendum in the international press also provided a moment for the SNP to project Scotland’s brand. The Scottish Government used this international attention to develop a conceptualization of what Scotland would be like in the international system. Seeking specifically to reassure existing states, “in his visits to other countries and in editorials in The Washington Post, First Minister Salmond attempted to explain to external audiences, and reassure them, these reasons behind the SNP’s bid for independence” (Beasley and Kaarbo, 2018: 17).

(2) Information Exchange through Diplomacy

Diplomatic efforts in the Scottish Government increased SNP politicians’ access to state governments. Members of the SNP involved in the Scottish Government explained how these diplomatic linkages also benefited the SNP by empowering its elite politicians. One SNP adviser explained:

> “We now meet ministers from pretty much all the European countries. The Spanish are the only ones that sit on the edge there. If you look at [Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs] Fiona Hyslop’s travel itinerary, she’s with the Dutch, she’s in the Balkans. We cover the broad swathe of it. Then you get to build new and different relationships. We have for

> a couple years been building relationships with the Icelandics. The current Prime Minister and the current FM met a couple of times before this PM got elected…it's a Green party so it's a sort of natural alliance." (Interview 49).

This quote shows the ways that party and government transnational links align. As noted in Sections III and IV, the SNP has sought to align itself with 'Nordic' values and has coalesced with the Greens at the European Parliament. Once in Government, SNP elites have access to further institutional links with these partners.

The SNP uses the Scottish Government to further specific areas of policy development. For example, the development of renewable energy capacity in Scotland provides "the opportunity to assert its territorial distinctiveness on the national and international stage" (McEwen and Bomberg, 2014: 79). One example of this is the Scottish Government's memorandum of understanding with California. Through this agreement: "[California] want to figure out how to have offshore wind turbines and use wave and tidal power and we have the experts…We're both allied on climate change so let's get into this conversation" (Interview 49).

In trying to push para-diplomacy further, the party has faced opposition from the UK Government and struggled with a lack of resources. One respondent explained:

> "Our international department is small, and our policy areas have not traditionally been geared up to working overseas…One of the barriers is still that we're a devolved government" (Interview 49).

Nonetheless, using the resources available, the SNP "were keen to basically operate as a government…we are trying to maximize Scotland's presence on that stage and at that level" (Interview 53). As the examples given in this section show, the SNP has built up an international infrastructure, cooperation around policy issues, and taken advantage of key events to promote Scotland. These institutional means provide SNP politicians with avenues to accessing

statewide political parties and other state governments. One senior adviser to the Scottish Government noted, “There were good relationships with Catalonia, the Basque Country but what was quite interesting was the fostering of links with nation-states for the purposes of economic development, trade promotion, and that kind of thing” (Interview 53).

Brexit will provide one last key example of the way that the SNP uses Government resources to build transnational relationships, but also how the party manages the boundaries between institutional and party political networking in Europe.

After Brexit, the SNP launched a campaign to promote Scotland’s place in Europe and to emphasize the *distinctiveness* of the Scottish vote on Brexit. SNP leader and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said at the time: “My objective at this very early stage is firstly to raise awareness of the fact that Scotland voted differently in this referendum to the UK as a whole” (Press Association, 29 June 2016).

The party’s effort to promote its pro-Europeanism was mobilized using the Scottish Government, SNP elected members at Westminster and in the European Parliament, and inter-regional party connections. Through the Scottish Government, both Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs Fiona Hyslop and then Minister for Europe Alasdair Allan reached out to other European countries to promote Scotland. One respondent explained, “I think there was a really interesting fact somewhere where it said something like by the Christmas of 2016, the Scottish Government had met with every single EU ambassador” (Interview 46). First Minister Nicola Sturgeon also travelled to Brussels numerous times to speak to leading officials including European Parliament President Martin Schulz, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, and leader of ALDE Guy Verhofstadt (Brown, 2016).

On the one hand, the Scottish Government can explain these activities as a way of promoting Scotland's place in Europe, particularly from an economic sense. However, for the SNP there is also a reputational factor. Alasdair Allan explained: "People know where we are now — and that wasn't always the case. I think people have a sense that Scotland exists in the modern world, that Scotland isn't just somewhere that exists as a tourist destination or something that exists at some point in history" (McLaughlin, 2017a). Brexit allowed the Scottish Government to gain more access to European elites. One respondent explained: "These high-level political officials in France and Germany and Juncker in the EU Commission suddenly wanted to open their doors to Hyslop and Sturgeon" (Interview 50).

The SNP also developed a European engagement plan at a more purely *party* level. The SNP's Westminster group undertook systematic engagement with other European parties. One Westminster staffer explained, "We had a deliberate plan of engagement with other governments and other opposition parties in other countries. There was a lot going on there and it was all around Scotland's Place in Europe and what the Scottish Government's position is in relation to Brexit" (Interview 41). Representatives from the SNP's Westminster group met with all the main political parties from Ireland, France, Germany, and Spain.

Furthermore, in the European Parliament, MEPs and other SNP elected members with European roles spread the same message. Perhaps the most public moment of SNP activism at the European Parliament was Alyn Smith's speech on the 28th of June 2016, which received a standing ovation from the European Parliament. However, MEPs also played a role building transnational connections—largely with non-regionalist partners—behind the scenes. One staffer explained that MEPs' outreach is:

> "Initially within the EP itself just making the SNP in Europe approachable and accessible to all of the MEPs who perhaps in the past

> didn't see it as a priority. First and foremost, within the Parliament itself. That's really paid off in the sense that you can see it now with Guy Verhofstadt in the ALDE party who has become quite a firm and close ally of Scotland's case in the context of Brexit" (Interview 46).

By renewing interest in Scotland, Brexit provided a unique opportunity structure for the SNP to use the Scottish Government, individual (MEP's and MP's) connections, and party resources to build transnational relationships. The SNP took a united approach to engagement on all these different platforms. For example, they have used institutions to speak to the Irish Government, but also sent individual MPs to Dublin to meet with Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. Party and para-diplomatic engagement is not mutually exclusive, but rather intimately related. As noted in Chapter Six, a consideration of how information acquired through diplomacy affects parties would be a useful space for further research.

7.6 Conclusion

Of all the parties studied in this thesis, the SNP is the most *electorally successful* and this affords them access to information through institutional access and party relationships. However, electoral success and the need to uphold a reputation as a *responsible government* means that the SNP separates itself from the EFA network. Thus, it has the most limited interactions with EFA partners of any case studied in this thesis. Even its closest partners, Plaid Cymru and ERC are seen as less successful than the SNP. Individual SNP activists and elected members have close relationships with ERC. However, the SNP's centralized decision making means that these diffuse transnational entrepreneurs do not have a clearly defined route to informing the party as a *collective* about transnational information that is acquired. The combination of electoral success, governing responsibility, and party centralization mean that the SNP does not learn from EFA partners.

The party does turn to regions and states that are perceived as more successful. Ideologically, a successful social democratic example is provided

by Nordic countries. Nordic countries have supplied the SNP with various policies (baby box, city architect, renewables) but they are also used in a symbolic emulative way. This provides a useful addition to the initial proposal of a party-to-party learning framework. Parties may also learn from state governments, city councils, and other institutions as well as other parties.

The other instance of learning, an inverse lesson from Quebec, highlights that it is important to consider ways in which learning can be implemented through *avoidance* as well as *adoption.* Both the Québécois case and the Nordic case show the importance of perception of success: that Nordic countries are successful, that the Québécois case is damaging. In the conclusion, I will consider the issue of fallibility in learning which recognizes the fallibility of actors' perceptions in learning.

This chapter has proposed a number of reasons that the SNP may be less transnationally active in the EFA network and less invested in the EU. The party is hindered in transnational learning by its centralized decision making process, focus on domestic events (the 2014 referendum and Brexit), lack of resources in the Scottish Government, and its disproportionate power among European regions.

One further factor that emerged was the role of the SNP's position in the UK. The UK's distance politically from the EU may also play a factor in the party's relatively modest investment in trans-European relationships. Parties' variant culture and history may influence their transnational behaviour. The following and final chapter will consider key findings from across the four political parties studied in this thesis and note how this reflects on the proposed party learning framework.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

The previous four chapters explored varied experiences of the European Free Alliance and member party learning. Parties' experiences were conditioned by a number of factors such as their electoral success (or lack thereof), their access to and enthusiasm for transnational relationships, internal contestation and organisational structures, and domestic events and policy debates. Varied contexts and positions within the EFA network led parties to different levels of learning. In this chapter, I develop key findings by comparing the four cases.

As the foundational question of this thesis, I asked: Do interactions between regionalist and nationalist parties in the European Free Alliance generate member party learning? If so, why and how? If not, why not? I found that parties *did* learn from other EFA members on issues such as environmental sustainability, campaign skills, the feasibility of autonomy, and electoral strategy. Lessons from transnational interactions were most often complementary to existing policy or strategy positions or combined with other causal factors to cause changes.

Having established that parties *do* learn, in the first section of this chapter, I review key findings about why and how parties progress through each stage of the learning process. I also identify common barriers to learning. In the stage of information acquisition, I find that hierarchy and institutional access greatly affect parties' patterns of learning. Information interpretation can provide a barrier to the further progress of learning, within the complex shift from individual to collective interpretation. It may also be skewed by the effect of parties' prior ideologies. Finally, in the implementation of information, it is clear that learning is one of *multiple* causes of change in parties. Furthermore, when information is implemented, it may be inaccurately adopted.

The second section will return to the contextual factors set out in Chapter One and propose some adjustments, in light of the comparative analysis. I also

propose the addition of a dimension for the ‘depth’ or ‘extent’ of learning. In the third section, I shed light on alternative consequences of transnational party networking. These consequences include other benefits of EFA membership (legitimacy, capacity building, solidarity, policy internationalization) and two learning adjacent phenomena (emulation and collaboration).

8.1 Key Findings

The explorative approach taken in this thesis allows for novel findings and refinement of the party learning framework. In this section, I compare party experiences and develop common findings. Findings are separated into the component parts of learning: (1) transnational interactions, (2) information acquisition, (3) interpretation, and (4) implementation. Throughout these sections, I will refer back to cases of learning identified in Chapters Four to Seven. These cases are summarized in Table 8.1, below.

Table 8.1: Identified Instances of Learning

Party	Instance of Learning	Stage/Type of Learning
Frisian National Party	Sustainable energy	Implementation
	Electoral strategy	Individual interpretation
Union Démocratique Bretonne	Campaign techniques	Implementation
	Autonomist policies (feasibility framing)	Implementation
	Electoral strategy	Implementation
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	Nordic Model	Emulation
	Mass mobilization	Teaching
Scottish National Party	Nordic model	Emulation/Learning
	Professionalization	Teaching
	Inclusive nationalism (Quebec)	Implementation (inverse)

(1) Patterns of Transnational Interaction

The starting point of my research question is the interactions between the member parties of the European Free Alliance. Chapter Three provided an

overview of EFA staff and central members and detailed how EFA organises and funds bilateral and multilateral interactions between EFA parties. Throughout the case studies, EFA events emerged as a key place for interaction: the FNP's regional sustainable energy conference, SNP Youth's Glasgow campaigning workshop, and EFA-supported observations at the Scottish and Catalan referendums.

Often parties do not explicitly note the role EFA played in their interactions. It was thus necessary to consider how EFA encourages interactions between parties. TNP staff described their jobs as incredibly varied and emphasized the importance of connecting parties to one another (Interview 10, 11). Many respondents saw the secretariat staff as a kind of *bridge* in the network. Bridging actors allow for the exchange of information across networks by relaying information between actors that may not be directly connected. This behaviour was evident in the central role that staff played in my observations of EFA's events. The TNP provides both an institutional and informal space for transnational relationships.

However, parties also developed 'sub-groups' of interaction within EFA. These subgroups limit the information that might be exchanged between parties. Sub-groups were generally organised geographically, linguistically, culturally, and ideologically. In each party, respondents identified a 'type' of party that they interacted with.

For example, in the UDB, party respondents identified most closely with other Celtic nations and spoke of the 'Atlantic Arc' as a representation of this concept. FNP respondents saw themselves as a 'North West' or 'Northern' party, aligned with interests around the North Sea. The SNP meanwhile aligned with powerful EFA parties and identified strongly with its image as a 'social democratic' party.

Interestingly, ERC's self-image varies. Party members described ERC as both a leader in the Mediterranean and as a 'Northern' social democratic country in

the south. This differentiation reflects different arenas for their transnational party interactions. Parties may thus identify different ‘group characteristics,’ in different time periods or venues. Nonetheless, across all the cases, respondents sought sub-groups that fit with their self-image as a party. EFA membership provides one basis for interactions, but parties further limit the scope of relationships in EFA.

There were also some systematic boundaries, implicit across all parties. For example, there was a strong Western/Eastern European split. Few parties noted any relationships or knowledge of the EU’s new accession state EFA members. Given that I selected parties to the left/center of EFA, an avoidance of more extreme right parties was also common across all parties. One respondent explained that “far right, anti-European and populist parties, this is for us probably the worst” (Interview 30).

In addition to these self-chosen sub-groups, parties limited their relationships in EFA by differences in success. Less successful parties tended to have a wider knowledge of other EFA parties. While they focused their attention on more successful parties, they also worked with less successful parties (for example: the UDB and the Cornish, the FNP and the Lusatians). On the other hand, EFA’s most successful parties often sought connections only with powerful EFA parties and statewide, non-EFA parties. The effect of this hierarchically driven pattern of EFA relationships will be discussed in section two.

(2) Information acquisition

The acquisition stage is the process in which information is supplied to a learner; it may occur purposefully or passively. Two findings about information acquisition became clear throughout the cases. Acquisition was driven by a hierarchy of success in EFA; parties tended to look for more successful examples, in EFA or beyond. Second, when parties had access to transnational

institutions, these were used to acquire information rather than the EFA network.

Hierarchies of Success

One of the clearest patterns that emerged across all four political parties was the importance of hierarchy. Perceptions of hierarchy were based in judgements of party size, electoral success, and resources. The SNP and ERC are the most visible 'success stories.' Hierarchy affects both what information parties *sought* and what information parties can *access*. Parties seek information from more successful examples, as they attempt to achieve the same success. However, successful parties may be less likely to share information due to time constraints and concerns about legitimacy.

One of the most straightforward statements of the hierarchical nature of the EFA network was from a Breton respondent. The respondent said: "We follow the example of Wales because, with Scotland, we are not at that level yet…That's really the thing: the Cornish want to be like the Bretons, the Bretons want to be like the Welsh, and the Welsh want to be like the Scots" (Interview 14). One member of the FNP's EFA Commission also explained, "[the SNP] is a party that is a bit ahead of us, that we're looking at, how did they manage to build it that way, in what way? That is also the case for the Catalans. Basically, the bigger players are also your examples" (Interview 5).

The FNP's learning on electoral strategy and the UDB's learning on electoral strategy, campaigning, and autonomist policy leaned on information about other parties' successful campaigns. The UDB acquired information about Corsican parties' successful experience of campaigning autonomously, the SNP's door knocking strategies, and the Welsh and Scottish devolved legislatures. These devolved legislatures were perceived by UDB members as a symbol of success for Plaid Cymru and the SNP.

Successful parties also impart information about their own successes. ERC and the SNP both 'teach' other parties. As one ERC respondent noted, "Some of these [EFA] parties they have few possibilities to have access to power. Actually, the SNP and ourselves are probably the most powerful in terms of internal politics" (Interview 30). Within EFA, ERC and the SNP had few clear successful examples outwith each other. However, as noted in Chapters Six and Seven, there were barriers to understanding between the SNP and Catalan parties. They subsequently learned from governing social democratic parties elsewhere.

The SNP also sought information from Quebec. Despite their hesitancy over what one interviewee called its 'exclusive nationalism,' the Parti Québécois and the Quebec referendum provided one of the only other cases of a sub-state independence referendum. One SNP respondent said: "the process was probably as close to being the same as any one that we've had recently" (Interview 38).

Interestingly, the Parti Québécois conversely was drawn to both the 2014 Scottish independence and 2017 Catalan independence referendums. PQ representatives attended both events, in the latter case also attending events put on by EFA. This shows the more informal nature of the EFA network, which often reaches beyond formal members. The PQ's interest in both these processes also shows how the concept of 'success' changes over time; while previously the PQ was one of the most 'successful' parties, over time they came to look to SNP and ERC as models of success.

In addition to conditioning the information that parties *seek* to acquire, hierarchy also affects the information they are *able* to acquire. For example, one case of learning that did not draw on hierarchies of success was the environmental sustainability project. This project was framed around shared problems (i.e. climate change, state opposition to regional control of energy) rather than prior

policy or electoral success. However, the FNP sought information from the SNP for their environmental sustainability project. They saw the SNP and the Scottish Government as a leader on renewable energies. Their efforts to learn were frustrated by the SNP's lack of information sharing. One FNP respondent noted:

> "The SNP have a lot of members and a lot of staff. We have one or two staff, but the SNP must have a lot of staff who work full time and they must, I assume, also have many policy groups that are working on the EU…They're a party in government in a really large region. In the Government, they must also have people working on this so you would say—they'll have someone as a contact person for EFA. But, one way or another, that's not the case" (Interview 9).

Frustration with the SNP's distance from EFA was repeated in various interviews with the UDB, FNP, and ERC. However, from the SNP's point of view, interaction with EFA parties was not a priority due to their relative lack of power.

Inability to access information also affected powerful parties. Both the SNP and ERC reported difficulties engaging with statewide political parties. They focused their engagement on *explaining* their stance to combat traditional negative stereotypes of nationalism rather than on gaining information. Despite regional success, they were still forced to overcome barriers to engagement with 'mainstream' statewide parties. Hierarchies thus delineate the information parties want and the information they can acquire.

Institutional Access

In the introduction I explained that EFA parties have few governing resources to access European politics. As such, the EFA network becomes a key resource through which nationalist and regionalist parties access relationships in the EU. However, where EFA member parties *do* have access to transnational institutions (such as para-diplomatic bodies), they actively acquire information from them. This may hinder party-to-party learning,

because parties focus their transnational energy on learning from different sources.

This finding also holds for parties without governing responsibility. The two non-governing parties chosen in this thesis had minority language protection as a central tenet of their policy platforms. Minority language protection has been institutionalized by the EU, due to the framing of minority languages as a legal issue (May, 2013: 246). Minority language protection is thus integrated into European legal and cultural networks and institutions.

Cross-European institutions on minority languages protection provide institutional access for smaller regionalist parties. For example, the FNP engages with other regions through the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), of which the Frisian Province is a member, and through the Inter-Frisian Council. Another non-party, institutional opportunity to network across Europe occurred through Leeuwarden's City of Culture bid. One respondent explained:

> "This year San Sebastian, Donostia, in the Basque Country, is the Cultural Capital of Europe. One of the projects there is setting up a protocol of linguistic rights. There was a delegation in Leeuwarden from the Basque Country, and they invited a number of people to talk about language rights - what should be included in such a protocol" (Interview 8).

The Frisian cultural dimension thus provided spaces for the FNP to engage in information exchange. In Brittany, information about minority language policy was acquired through the UDB's Nantes city councillor responsible for linguistic issues. He used this position to travel to Wales and Ireland to discuss language policies. He also met with a delegation from Plaid Cymru, which he saw as a 'strategic' interaction.

In both cases, institutions provided new resources to travel, interact with partners (political, administrative, civil society), and acquire information *beyond*

EFA. As the UDB and Plaid Cymru links show, institutional acquisition may overlap with EFA relationships.

The most prominent use of institutional access is the SNP and ERC's use of the Scottish and Catalan Governments to obtain transnational information. Both invested in pre-existing para-diplomatic bodies and built more international representations to develop transnational contacts. While these links are made by government bodies, elite politicians in governing parties *use* institutional connections.

Both the SNP and ERC sought information about other *governments'* choices using institutional connections. For example, the SNP's Glasgow City Council Group met with officials from Copenhagen city council to develop ideas for their electoral manifesto. The SNP has regularly referred to a 'Norway style' oil fund and oil exploration credits. The party campaigned for and implemented the Finnish-style baby box. The party's leaders, through their Government role, have sought to build relationships with Arctic Council states, for example through hosting the Arctic Circle Forum in Edinburgh in 2017.

A senior SNP adviser reported that, for a "lot of the low carbon policies we look and steal from Norway and the Scandinavian countries… [Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform] Roseanna Cunningham is in Norway now looking at electric vehicles" (Interview 49). While the line between party and government policy learning is (purposefully) blurry, it is clear that SNP politician's roles as ministers in the Scottish Government provide institutional means to seek information.

In Catalonia, ERC respondents noted that politicians from other European countries visited the Catalan Parliament as part of Parliamentary delegations. ERC MPs and leaders also noted engagement abroad through Parliamentary cross-party groups on Catalonia (in the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Switzerland). One MP explained, "they have open minds to freedom processes…so we find

meetings with ambassadors and meet with political parties of the Parliament" (Interview 22). ERC used the status and institutional space of the Catalan Parliament to access transnational relationships.

Acquisition through institutions is not always straightforward. Information may be acquired by actors in their roles as Government advisers, city councilors, legislators, and members of civil society organisations, but used in their political party roles. That is to say: the *same individuals* play key roles both in political parties and transnational institutions. Elite ERC and SNP advisers are influential in shaping government para-diplomatic strategies. Members of the UDB and FNP are often also activists in civil society and cultural organisations. Information acquired through transnational institutions is not only used in institutional spaces; it will also affect party decisions. The relationship between the acquisition of information in institutions and its subsequent use in party learning process should be further detailed in future studies.

(3) Information Interpretation

Information interpretation is the process through which individuals understand information meaning in its original context and then adapt that piece of information to their context. On a collective level, interpretation occurs when party members develop a joint understanding of the significance of information. I found that interpretation is affected by prior understandings and that the shift from individual to collective interpretation is particularly important in party learning.

Effect of Prior Policy and Ideological Preferences

Information interpretation was not built on a *tabula rasa,* a blank slate. As such, parties and their decision makers "rarely find themselves in uncharted territory" (Freeman, 2006: 373). Individuals and parties build their interpretations of new, learned information on existing understandings and ideologies. Existing beliefs

will affect how parties judge transnational information, whether they see it as valuable, and whether it is adopted/implemented.

For example, the FNP's regional sustainable energy was aimed at sharing 'best-practice' from across Europe. However, when other parties and scientists shared their experiences of onshore wind turbines, the FNP rejected this information as not fitting with the 'Frisian landscape.' Their strong existing anti-turbine policy conditioned their interest in the findings presented at the energy conference. In the process of adaptation to the Frisian context, some information was ignored. The SNP's response to the Parti Quebecois (PQ) was also conditioned by the party's existing ideology and self-image. Party member's interpretation of the PQ's immigration policies as disadvantageous and negative was conditioned by their strong attachment to being civic 'inclusive' nationalists.

Interpretation is biased not just by parties' stances, but *individuals'* prior knowledge and positions. All members of the FNP drew on the SNP example, but interpretations differed significantly. One respondent, for example, promoted a shift to the left in the FNP and referenced the bedroom tax as an example of linking social welfare and nationalism (Interview 5). Another explained, that the SNP was not based in identity politics, so that the FNP's learning should be centered on economic policies (Interview 6). Others felt that the SNP's success was based around 'staying true to your roots,' and 'having a strong connection with the people' (Interview 7, Interview 8). One respondent, more honestly, noted that they felt the party did not yet understand why the SNP was successful (Interview 8). Each of the respondents drew on their own skills and positionality which led to varied interpretations.

The effect of partisanship and prior ideologies has been explored in previous learning studies. These find that governments and policy makers are more likely to learn about policies that already fit their ideological point of view and

partisanship (Grossback et al., 2004; Gilardi, 2010; Butler et al., 2017). Political parties and their members also follow this pattern.

Individual to Collective Interpretation

As noted in Chapter One, organizational learning scholars emphasized the shift from individual to collective learning (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013: 485). The cases in this thesis confirm that the move from individual to collective interpretation is a key component to party learning. Two patterns of learning emerge: one in which this shift is smooth and the other in which it must be negotiated. The nature of the move towards collective interpretation is affected by issue contestation and party organisational centralization. Low issue contestation and high party centralization encourage collective interpretation; high issue contestation and low party centralization hinder collective interpretation.

It is first useful to illustrate the two patterns of learning. First, the more difficult negotiated shift from individual to collective learning can be seen on the issue of electoral strategy in both the FNP and UDB. In these cases, party elites first changed their position on strategic choices and then sought to negotiate this change through the membership. Respondents reported discussing the policy change in collective forums and in the UDB's case, the party's leadership was changed as a result of this discussion. In the FNP, the inability to convince members of the change meant the party did not collectively learn.

In other cases, collective interpretation was more straightforward. For example, the SNP and ERC's use of Nordic examples fit smoothly into existing agreed policies. The model confirms the parties' self-perceptions of themselves as socially democratic. The same was true for the FNP's learning on sustainable energy; the party had agreed in previous manifestos to prioritize their environmental policy.

Table 8.2 Cases of Learning and Issue Contestation

Party	Case of Learning	Issue Contestation	Stage of Learning
FNP	Sustainable energy	Low	Implementation
	Electoral strategy	High	Individual interpretation
UDB	Campaigning	Low	Implementation
	Autonomist 'feasibility' framing	Low	Implementation
	Electoral strategy	High	Implementation
ERC	Nordic model	Low	Implementation (emulation)
SNP	Nordic model	Low	Implementation (emulation)
	Inclusive nationalism	Low	Implementation

Table 8.2 shows that most cases of learning identified in the empirical chapters occurred in situations of low issue contestation within political parties. It seems that collective interpretation and implementation occur more easily where the object of learning is a collectively agreed policy.

Notably, a counter example of non-learning also occurred in the FNP. For the FNP, asylum and refugee policy was a contentious policy area; the issue and the party's lack of clear policy emerged consistently in interviews. However, the issue was so contested within the FNP that it was not discussed at a transnational level (despite the clearly transnational nature of the issue).

Learning on issues of low and high levels of issue contestation occurs in a different pattern. The key to this difference is in the move from individual to collective interpretation. On contested issues, learning depends far more on the process of elite negotiation and dissemination of transnational information to members. On uncontested issues, the move from individual to collective interpretation is easier.

Negotiations between party members over information interpretation were affected by the party's organisational structure. The parties studied in this

thesis varied significantly in their level of organisational centralization, from the FNP's *decentralization* to the SNP's *centralization*. The UDB and ERC developed territorial and sectorial commissions which led to a *structured decentralization.*

In the cases of both the SNP and the FNP, organisational structure complicated learning. In the SNP, many members were interested and involved in transnational relations. However, there was little identifiable collective learning in the SNP. Transnationally active individuals in the SNP reported that there were no clear procedures to share information with the central elites or to disseminate transnational information to the party as a collective.

In the FNP, information about transnational interactions was shared across the party, especially through the party's 'EFA Commission.' However, the party is decentralized in that individual territorial branches have a lot of power. Even though numerous FNP elite saw the benefit of running in statewide elections, the general party membership resisted this and fought for the Frisian dimension to remain dominant. These cases show that making rules (formal) and norms (informal) affect individuals' ability to share transnational information and influence how that information is interpreted by other party members.

As I noted in Chapter One, contextual factors interact with one another. In the cases reviewed in Chapters Four through Seven, I found that the level of issue contestation and party centralization interact with one another by affecting party decision making and negotiation processes. This interaction significantly affects the shift from individual to collective information interpretation.

(4) Information Implementation

When new information is implemented, parties display a change in their policy or strategy options, argumentation, framing, or choice. In the implementation stage, I found that parties use transnational information *alongside* other reasons for a change in cognition or behaviour. Parties may also implement

lessons inaccurately, or in ways that suggest a lack of understanding of the original policy.

Multiple Causation

When transnational learning is implemented it leads to change. The type of change varies significantly across the cases, from the adoption of a new electoral strategy to the adoption of a new argument to support an existing policy. In each case, party change was also affected by other forces domestically. The implementation of learning should thus be understood as part of a wider process of changes within a party.

Updating information in a party inevitably interacts with other factors that affect party choice such as internal party rules, institutions, intra-party factionalism, and inter-party competition. Learning provides new policy or strategy *options*; the adoption of a particular option is affected by multiple factors. Furthermore, learning is often iterative, so the process of change often follows a longer pattern of 'enlightenment' "whereby the findings accumulated over time gradually alter decision-makers' perceptions" (Sabatier, 1991: 148).

For example, in the case of the UDB's new electoral strategy, Breton dissatisfaction with the performance of the Socialist Party had long been stirring. The election of the Socialist French Government and subsequent lack of regional reform pushed party member's discomfort with electoral alliances to the edge. Party elites thus turned to the option of running autonomously in elections. Their observations of and consultation with EFA partners strengthened their belief that this option would be successful.

In the FNP, elites were concerned about the party's stagnation in voter share and seeking a way to improve outcomes. The party observed locally that their voters often turned to other parties for their statewide votes. Elites worried that the FNP did not have enough of a distinctive position in the local political sphere. Running in statewide elections was seen as one possible solution. EFA

partners like the SNP and Plaid Cymru provided positive examples of this choice. In both contexts, party discussions with EFA parties provided an *additional* encouragement to party or individual changes in strategy.

In the case of the emulation of the Nordic model in both ERC and the SNP, both parties had a pre-existing ideological consensus promoting a strong welfare state. These ideological choices and positions were developed over a long period of time, and affected by many factors, including their competitive positioning within the region. However, looking transnationally at Nordic examples provided further detail and argumentative support for the parties' policy positions. Transnational information thus helped ERC and the SNP to further develop policies that were already shaped by domestic forces.

Inaccurate Learning

As noted in the literature review, learning has previously been tied to an 'accuracy criterion' (Levy, 1994). In this thesis, I have not claimed that learning *must* be accurate. However, when considering the 'lessons' adopted by EFA member parties, I found that parties often implemented inaccurate or overinflated lessons.

For example, the SNP's emulation of a Nordic model does not align with a deeper implementation of Nordic policies. The SNP regularly used the image of the Nordic 'paradise.' Newby noted: "there are so many references to Norden and individual Nordic states that it is reasonable to assume that politicians believe that general popular perception of Nordic society to be positive – A Good Thing" (Newby, 2009: 323). However, the SNP often did not have the means to implement Nordic *policies* given the different needs of Scotland. I found in Chapter Seven that the SNP's references to Nordic examples drew on a symbolic usefulness, rather than detailed adoption of new policies.

A symbolic approach to learning which privileges a shallower understanding of transnational examples. Stone differentiates between those who "may adopt

lessons for symbolic purposes or as a strategic device to secure political support rather than as a result of improved understanding" (1999: 56). As such, in some cases, like ERC and the SNP's adoption of a Nordic model, the implemented lessons did not show a changed understanding or greater evidence base.

One Scottish respondent referred to a case where Basque nationalists referred to the Scottish independence referendum as "instrumental in them supporting the peace process and how their visits to Scotland had given them hope that there wouldn't be a renewal of violence" (Interview 50). While Basques *sought* to attach themselves to the Scottish case, the peace process began much earlier than the 2014 referendum. The process was much more complex than this characterization. Linking the Basque process to the Scottish referendum is a politically *useful* choice, but it can lead to overinflated claims of learning and teaching.

Inaccurate learning may be built on symbolic or reputational goals rather than a more detailed learning process. These limited findings of inaccuracy also suggest the importance of critically questioning claims of learning and, as Stone does, differentiating between types of learning. In section 8.2, I will suggest the addition of a measurement of 'depth' or 'extent' of learning to the party learning framework.

(5) Reflections on the Learning Process

The three-stage process of learning proved a useful stepwise description of the way that the parties' exchange, adapt, and adopt transnational information. Parties acquired more information than was ultimately implemented. As noted in section three, learning was sometimes halted in the interpretive stage. The processes of interpretation and collective information dissemination were at the crux of the learning process. Learning was eased when parties had collective agreement on a policy issue, and the ability to communicate new information

to one another. In addition, one of the clearest patterns of learning was the focus on parties perceived as successful. Parties' perception of 'success' drove their interest in certain transnational partners and shaped patterns of information exchange.

Within the stage of implementation, cross-case patterns were less clear. Implementation occurred less often than the other stages of learning. Furthermore, the difficulty with identifying implementation was foreseen in Chapter One, with the discussion of the tension between studying learning as a process and an outcome. At the 'outcome' point of implementation, the specific effect of learning may be difficult to disaggregate from other causes of change (as discussed above). In future studies, the conceptual definition of 'implementation' could be improved. This might be done by disaggregating types of implementation. That is, does learning affect policy or strategy? Does it affect the ultimate decision or only the framing/evidence provided? Does implementation occur across the party or is it isolated within smaller sub-groups of elites?

Another key finding that emerged is on the object of learning. In the initial party framework, I left the object of learning unbounded to allow for varied types of objects, such as policy, strategy, or party organisational norms. In this thesis, I found that parties often learned on issues of strategy. Six of the ten instances of learning in table 8.1 involve strategic learning: the FNP and statewide elections, the UDB and running autonomously, the UDB and campaigning, the SNP and avoidance of a Quebec-like 'neverendum,' and ERC and SNP teaching on mass mobilization and professionalization. I posit three causes for the predominance of strategy learning: (1) it is a commonality between all parties; (2) it touches on the 'performance' dimension of learning; and (3) it may be an easier, shallower learning.

First, running in elections is common to all political parties. As such, it provides a useful space for interaction between parties from disparate cultural and political backgrounds. Furthermore, EFA parties often send representatives to other regions for big electoral moments and referendums. The TNP secretariat also focus communications efforts around these events. Electoral moments provide a focal point for transnational party activism.

Second, in organisational learning, the outcome of interest is 'performance' (March, 1991: 85). Organisations seek competitive advantage through learning. Parties can be considered as political organisations with three goals: policy, office, and vote maximizing (Müller et al., 1999). As such, when parties seek competitive advantage, it is likely learning would revolve around improving their performance electorally and gaining office.

Finally, strategic changes may be easier than changes to underlying ideological stances. Strategy is seen to affect a 'shallower' level of belief in a party. Learning can be separated into two types or different orders of depth from "shallow, tactical or instrumental learning" to "deeper social or policy learning" (Stone, 2004: 549). Learning on campaign tactics, professionalization, mobilization, and electoral strategy are less intrusive to the 'core' of a political party than ideological changes. In the next section, I propose that it would be useful to add a theoretical dimension to consider the 'extent' or depth of learning.

8.2 Reflecting on Contextual Factors and Extent of Learning

These findings and the case studies explored in this thesis have confirmed that there is a phenomenon of party learning in the EFA network. Having confirmed the existence of the process of learning, and identified findings about each stage of learning, I now propose some adjustments to two other dimensions of the party learning framework: the five identified contextual factors and the depth/extent of learning.

Each of the contextual factors identified affected party learning. I review these findings and the possible adjustments that could be made to each factor in this section. In further studies, it would be worthwhile in the future to consider whether there are stable patterns of interaction between factors. For example, is there a configuration of key entrepreneurs and party centralization that is most conducive of learning? Are high levels of issue contestation in a party mediated by strong key entrepreneurs? Future studies may also wish to control for some contextual factors in a more focused comparison, to test the relevance of each against the other.

(1) Electoral success

I posited that electoral success would affect what parties learned and who parties learned from, because electoral success indicates the 'value' of other parties' policies and strategies. This thesis confirmed that electoral success was a key factor in learning. As I noted in section 8.1, it consistently influenced where political parties sought their information. The SNP and ERC sought information from statewide parties, governing parties, and one another. Meanwhile, the two less electorally successful parties (the UDB and FNP) looked to the SNP, ERC, and Plaid Cymru as successful members of EFA.

However, it may be worthwhile in the future to move beyond electoral results as a measure of 'success.' The key factor was that party elites *perceived* other parties to be successful. Electoral results were one part of this perception, but respondents also considered parties' success in achieving regional autonomy. For example, respondents noted that the SNP was further 'along the path' or 'on the journey' to autonomy. The UDB studied Welsh and Scottish devolution processes. They linked the achievement of establishing Welsh and Scottish devolved legislatures with the success of Plaid Cymru and SNP (despite those parties' lack of electoral success in early devolved elections). As such, at least

the EFA context, parties also perceive success as progress in achieving the party's autonomy goal.

In this thesis, I focus on the interactions between political parties and on those political parties' characteristics. This is due to my interest in both the *agents* and *process* of learning, rather than the content of the lessons learned. However, I found that learning was affected by the performance of other policies in addition to parties' electoral performance. For example, the SNP referred to the success of renewables policies in Norway. The FNP sought information from the SNP on renewable energy, because of their understanding that Scotland had successfully implemented renewables policies. Since the late 1990s, the UDB has framed its autonomist goals around the models of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament.

The literature on policy learning and transfer notes that policy success and the demonstration of that success internationally facilitates policy learning (Shipan and Volden, 2008). Policy success is relevant to learning because "the underlying assumption is that policies that have been successful in one country will be successful in another" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 17). McConnell (2010) explores this assumption and the arguments about whether policy success is transferable. On one extreme, a policy maker might argue that conditions for policy success are universal. Another extreme may be that conditions for success differ in every context. However, McConnell posits a compromise, which suggests that conditions for policy success are familial. This argument is useful when considering learning among EFA parties. Parties in EFA "share similarities in a 'family' way" such as shared goals, geographical areas, and histories (McConnell, 2010: 200). This 'familial' link may make parties more likely to see one another's policy successes as relevant to their own region/nation.

In order to learn from the success of a policy, the learner “must gather information and sort previous experiences into instances where the policies have had the *desired effect* and those where they have not, before emulating the former” (Marsh and Sharman, 2008: 232). The search for evidence is thus a key link between policy success and learning. The recent emphasis on evidence-based policy making and best-practice sharing enhance the importance of prior policy success in policymaking.

Information used as evidence of success may be part of a more systematic, institutionalized policy evaluation (often conducted by civil servants or independent bodies). However, actors may also be evaluate and seek evidence about the strategic success of a policy, the way it was perceived by the public, or the way a certain policy would allow them to compete with political opponents (Shipan and Volden, 2012). Marsh and McConnell (2010) identify three possible forms of success: programmatic, process, and political. The evaluation of success is not a purely technocratic task; the choice of evidence and perception of ‘policy success’ is also inherently political (Cairney, 2017).

Understandings of policy success are affected by the evidence and measures of success chosen, but also by the character of the evidence disseminators. The social and hierarchical position of actors affects which policies are most likely to be seen as successful (and thus most likely to be learned). Dunlop and Radaelli (2013, 2016) find that the social certification of actors is a key condition that affects learning. Actors have a higher certification when they “are perceived as competent, technically skilled, independent, or all of these” (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 258). The inequality of actors’ social positions affects what is learned and from who. This was clear in the cases studied; certain political parties were seen as more ‘expert’ than others and thus their policy expertise was more sought after. There is thus an overlap between the factor of electoral success and policy success.

Those receiving the information may not be ‘equally sensitive’ to different measures or ways of describing success depending on their prior beliefs and preferences (Gilardi, 2010). Both the policy learner’s and policy exporter’s “policy analytical capacity” may affect the process (Howlett, 2009). Given that research shows that politicians and institutions often have limited analytical capacity, it would be useful to consider how party elites use ‘cognitive shortcuts’ and bounded rationality to determine success (Meseguer, 2005).

As the policy literature emphasizes, *perception* matters. The importance of perception can be illustrated by contrasting ERC and the SNP’s status in the EFA network. While both have been successful electorally, the SNP was more often *perceived* as an example by other political parties. Absolute electoral results are not alone a sufficient measurement of success. As such, in the future, it would be useful to consider how parties evaluate success in a more complex way. This expanded contextual factor of success could consider both electoral (political) and policy (programmatic) success. It could also consider more clearly how success is bounded by the choice of evidence, positionality of the evidence disseminators, and analytical capacity of the learner.

Nonetheless, within the limitations of this study, parties’ electoral success has proven to be a good proxy for the wider and more amorphous concept of success. There were differences in the patterns of learning between the more electorally successful parties (SNP and ERC) and the less electorally successful parties (UDB and FNP) with the latter two seeking information particularly from the former two.

(2) Governing responsibility

I posited that governing responsibility would bring parties additional resources to interact transnationally outside of EFA and that it would constrain them by leading to more domestic scrutiny of their choices. As reviewed in the previous

section, institutional resources and para-diplomacy led parties to learn from different sources of information.

Governing resources allowed for non-party transnational learning, through para-diplomatic bodies and other cross-European institutions. ERC and the SNP both displayed clear interest in relationships with parties outside of EFA and their governing responsibility allowed them to advance these interests, particularly around the Catalan independence referendum and Brexit (respectively). Governing resources, when parties had access, did affect party learning by redirecting parties' transnational interactions away from EFA.

I also posited that governing responsibility might affect parties' relationships with EFA by raising concerns of legitimacy. In the SNP and ERC, respondents displayed concerns of speaking to smaller, right wing parties from across Europe. However, this was not only an issue for governing parties. The UDB also expressed issues with the EFA relationships with right wing parties; they took this forward by proposing the suspension of parties that had allied with the Lega Nord. Respondents noted that the UDB did not want to be tainted by the radical right, given the presence of radical right wing Breton autonomist movements. As such, the issue of legitimacy was not clearly tied to parties' governing responsibility.

In future applications, it would be useful to further develop this variable to consider *institutional access.* As noted in section 8.1, the UDB and FNP had relationships across Europe based on their minority language protection policies. As such, the use of institutions rather than EFA to communicate abroad is not limited to para-diplomatic government bodies.

It would also be useful to add more nuance to the concept of governing responsibility and the power of the regional decision making body. Future applications of the framework should allow for more variations on 'governing responsibility' to emerge. For example, the position of parties in coalitions was

not fully explored in this thesis. As part of the coalition agreement, the FNP emphasized their environmentalist policies. This then emerged as their key project in EFA. Analogously, the UDB's city councillor in the Nantes City Council ruling coalition took on responsibility for language policies. He built on this position to travel to Wales, for example, and also met Plaid Cymru while there. Governing responsibility thus affects parties in more complex ways than initially proposed.

Additionally, the power of regional governments is important. Both the SNP and ERC had access to powerful regional governments, with already developed para-diplomatic bodies. They also further invested in developing the para-diplomatic arms of their governments. As such, not only have the parties gained access, they *used* that access to expand their regions' transnational institutional power and build connections.

Considering the varied nature of 'responsibility' in government, of institutional access and of regional institutional power (and changes over time) would provide a more nuanced understanding of how governing responsibility affects transnational relationships.

(3) Party centralization

I developed a three-part categorization of party's internal organizational structures: centralized, structured decentralized, and decentralized. I posited that both centralization and decentralization would affect learning by altering patterns of information dissemination and decision making in a party.

In the most decentralized and most centralized parties, these expectations were realized. The SNP was the most centralized case, with a 'democratized' structure but significant elite coordination and control of information. In this structure, the many SNP elected members with relationships to Catalonia and European institutions did not clearly feed this information back to the party leadership. Members with responsibilities in European regional institutions

noted that there was no clear structure to feed their transregional discussions back to the SNP leadership. They noted that they had to personally reach out to party leaders to share transnational information. There was a clear centralized control of decision making in the SNP, based around the Scottish Government and Parliamentary groups. As such, transnational information acquired by individuals outside of these central groups is unlikely to be clearly disseminated and thus collectively interpreted in the SNP.

On the other hand, the FNP was the most decentralized case. Individual FNP council groups may adopt different policy positions, and consensus building occurs through various thematic and regional discussion forums. A number of elite members sought to push the FNP's participation in statewide elections, drawing on the Scottish example. However, this was seen as a move away from the Frisian language and cultural policies that founded the party and other elites noted that the party membership pushed back on strategic change. This halted the implementation of learning, showing the effect of a lack of centralized control.

I also conceptualized a midway between decentralization and centralization, structured decentralization. In these cases, decision-making and information seeking is decentralized to specialized sub-groups based around territories or policy areas. Structured sub-groups were evident in ERC, the UDB and the FNP. In each case, specific international affairs sub-groups sought information from abroad and from EFA partners. However, the sub-groups then interacted with party elites and membership differently in each case. No clear finding about the affect of 'structured decentralization' emerged.

This suggests that my initial conceptualization of party centralization was ultimately too crude. Parties' internal structures showed greater variation on than the three identified categories. For example, in some parties, sub-groups were advisory and based largely in indirect transnational research. In other

parties, sub-groups proposed policy changes, pro-actively sought relationships, and members did significant amounts of travel. Structure, skill, and institutional power of the sub-groups differed across each case.

As such, the category of 'structured decentralization' obscured a diversity of arrangements. The FNP, for example, despite having policy-specific and territorial sub-groups, did not empower these groups. The groups did not help create consensus in the FNP. On the other hand, in ERC, sub-groups were comprised of powerful individuals. They had significant power to affect party policy and direct communication powerful members of the Catalan Government. Future studies should provide a more precise categorization and explicit the variation between the extremes of decentralized and centralized structures.

Further detail about the range of party structures (formal and informal) might also answer some questions that emerged. For example: What is the role of policy-specific commissions in parties (particularly those with European or transnational remits)? To what extent is learning an explicit function of party sub-groups? Can the level of party centralization be measured through party regulatory documents or is it driven by agential behaviour and informal norms? A more nuanced approach would better reveal how these specific dimensions of party organisational centralization affect learning.

(4) Key Entrepreneurs

Key entrepreneurs are individuals active at both a domestic and transnational level, who worked to progress the TNP and connect the domestic to the transnational level. Contrary to my expectations, all the parties studied had transnational entrepreneurs. Parties varied not on the *presence* of entrepreneurs but their *position* and *skills*.

As noted in the previous section, in situations of high issue contestation, individuals needed to negotiate and disseminate transnational information

within their domestic political party. Entrepreneurs are thus not only those with interest in and ability to acquire transnational information, but those who can disseminate it.

A comparison between the SNP and ERC provides illustrative of the importance of entrepreneurs' positions and skills. In the SNP, there were numerous individuals with connections across Europe and in European institutions like the Committee of the Regions. However, these individuals did not have clear positions in the SNP's decision making process. The size of the party also meant that the dissemination of information required significant persistence and influence. Furthermore, the SNP's entrepreneurs were not based in the EFA bureau or secretariat. Rather, SNP elected members have cultivated individual relationships in Europe (especially with Catalan partners). The positioning of SNP entrepreneurs outside of EFA's central bodies results in the party's more constrained relationships within the wider EFA network.

Alternately, ERC entrepreneurs have prominent positions in EFA, such as Secretary General and President of EFAy. Elite ERC politicians in Catalonia (such as the Minister for Europe) previously held positions in the EFA bureau or sat as EFA MEPs. This ensures that knowledge and commitment to EFA remains central to ERC, despite their recent outreach to other European governments and statewide parties. The centrality of EFA for ERC elites has also ensured that ERC has been active in leading and 'teaching' in EFA, for example imparting their organizing skills around mass mobilization.

The FNP provides a good example of the importance of institutional positions to entrepreneurship. EFA entrepreneurs were central to the party's executive bodies, the party has a dedicated 'EFA Commission,' and the EFA bureau has an FNP member. Respondents emphasized their ability to 'call up' their colleagues in Brussels. Information had a relatively short distance to travel from

EFA to the FNP. FNP entrepreneurs used their positions and connections developed through these positions to acquire information from EFA.

However, institutional positions are not the only resource entrepreneurs employ. For example, UDB members do not hold any staff or bureau positions in EFA. However, Breton actors remain engaged in EFA at a high level. They mobilize linguistic and ideological skills in order to do so. For example, one prominent UDB member employs their Welsh language skills. The UDB also builds on their ideological basis to the left of EFA to build up a sub-group of left-wing EFA members.

Scholars have previously noted skills are required to perform policy entrepreneur roles including social acuity, team building, leadership by example, creativity, and flexibility (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Mintrom and Luetjens, 2017). Other scholars have considered the psychological strategies used by entrepreneurs (King and Roberts, 1992; Timmermans et al., 2014).

The importance of skill and position in entrepreneurship shows that entrepreneurship is a *relative* characteristic. This relational perspective could allow me to further integrate the concept of TNP entrepreneurship with network methods. After all, entrepreneurs' skills are largely about their ability to relate to others. Networks measure and describe relational ties. By providing a picture of these ties, "an actor's network provides a framework within which the actor can project power, control information flows and attempt to influence political outcomes or other actors" (Christopoulos, 2006: 758). Social network analysis (SNA) methods have been used to link network structure and the policy-changing ability and resources of individuals (Ingold and Christopoulos, 2015).

In future studies, it would be useful to move beyond the binary conception of entrepreneurship by considering the importance of institutional positions, entrepreneurial skills, and how the relationship between the two can be evaluated, perhaps using SNA.

(5) Issue contestation

I posited that issue contestation may lead parties to seek solutions from transnational partners. However, contestation might also mean that parties struggle to develop collective interpretations of acquired information. In the case studies, I found that issue contestation affects the interpretation and negotiation process, as discussed in the section 8.1. As noted in that section, the contextual factor of issue contestation interacts considerably with other contextual factors, such as party centralization.

I also found that issue contestation plays a part in the acquisition stage of learning. Parties are more likely to seek transnational information as part of a process of *agreed* policy development. For example, the UDB recently sought to restate its core policies. Part of this process was clearly articulating its stances and arguments for autonomism. The party's result of this policy project (the book *S'emanciper*) drew on many transnational examples. It recommitted the UDB to its proposal of Welsh and Scottish-type autonomous bodies.

FNP respondents emphasized the need to expand their policy platform, to 'show their colours.' Policy development centred particularly on the *agreed* area of environmental policies. This was a common area of interest for party members. As such, the party expanded its policies on environmental sustainability, in particular by reaching out to EFA partners and developing comparative research. However, the party had also sought to agree on a policy on the salient issue of refugee and asylum seeker policy, but they failed to do so. Given its contentious nature, they did not seek to expand their policies in this area and did not engage in transnational learning on this issue.

In cases where policy platforms are more developed, parties looked transnationally to develop new policy arguments or detail. For example, in the SNP and ERC, policy platforms were much more developed. As such, instances of learning in these parties elaborated on and justified existing policy

commitments. This specification of policy proposals and shallower use of transnational examples can be seen in ERC and the SNP's emulation of Nordic models to detail social welfare policies.

Issue contestation thus plays a part at two different levels of learning. Parties acquire information transnationally to inform policy development on agreed policy areas. Few instances of information acquisition centered on contested issues; this suggests that internal issue contestation hinders transnational information-seeking. Furthermore, as detailed in section 8.1, contestation affects the move from individual to collective interpretation and thus may also halt learning at this point in the process.

(6) Extent of Learning

One prominent finding emerges from the cases which was not anticipated in the proposed party learning framework. There cases showed that there is a wide variety in the *depths* or *extent* of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes discovered in this thesis range from the adoption of technical proposals around sustainable energy to changes in electoral campaigns to more diffuse ideas such as the Nordic welfare state. Some changes were easily negotiated through parties, whereas others were more vehemently contested. Existing literature on policy learning has addressed different depths of learning. It may be useful to consider this dimension of party learning in more focused applications.

The depth of learning is often considered along a continuum from 'thin' to 'thick' learning, or shallow to deep learning (Checkel, 1998). Thin learning is strategically motivated or 'symbolic' with the object of learning 'limited to coping strategies' or problem solving (Radaelli and Schmidt, 2004: 371; Dunlop, 2014: 219). It occurs when the actor "learns to cope with a problem without changing preferences" (Radaelli, 2008: 244). At its shallowest form, learning resembles imitation, a 'non-creative' process in which actors wholly adopt another actor's

policy as a ‘black box’ (Jacoby, 2001: 174). This has also been called instrumental learning (May 1992) or ‘technical-strategic’ learning (Howlett, 2012). It often reflects compliance to an external body, not internalization of new ideas (Börzel, 2010: 10). Thin learning may also be very rational and epistemic. Epistemic learning is associated with a search for those who are experts in a specialist subject (Dunlop, 2009; Dunlop, 2017: 24).

Deeper learning occurs when individuals or institutions alter their underlying ‘logic of behaviour’ (Radaelli and Schmidt, 2004: 189). This has also been called ‘political-experiential’ learning (Howlett, 2012) and reflexive learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 603). Deep learning affects policy ends (i.e. underlying goals and objectives) rather than policy means (Howlett and Cashore, 2009: 35-36). In order to redefine underlying logics of behaviour, deep learning requires deliberation and discourse, “a process of communication, persuasion and invention” (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 603, 607-608). Depth of learning is thus related to the type and length of the learning process. Educational psychologists have shown that there is a positive relationship between time (learning phases) and the shift from surface to more meaningful learning (Shuell, 1990).

The depth of learning is also linked to the object of learning. Shallow learning, given its emphasis on rote adoption, might alter a singular policy or strategy to serve an existing goal. In shallow learning, the object is often more technocratic. In deep learning, lessons are more abstract, ‘substantive, value-based, experiential’ (Dunlop, 2015: 263).

Considering the extent of learning will add an extra layer on to the party learning framework. It may also help clarify some ambiguities. One of the issues with studies of learning is that there is a “tendency to conflate simpler forms of learning-by-observing (such as mimicry) with more complex forms (such as concept formation)” (Dolowitz, 2009: 318). Conceptualizing and measuring the

'depth' of learning in relation to political parties would allow for a clearer distinction between shallower, technocratic forms of party learning and deeper, negotiated forms.

8.3 Beyond and at the Boundaries of Learning in a TNP

This thesis proposed that applying a party learning approach helps to explain *one* possible consequence of transnational party networking. However, there are varied outcomes of party networking within EFA. For example, scholars have previously considered the role of the TNP in the European Parliament and their contribution to European integration. This thesis has focused on the effects of the TNP on the *domestic member party*, rather than on European institutions.

In addition to learning, I found evidence of further consequences of TNP networking for member parties. These other consequences help to delineate the boundaries of the party learning concept and may provide useful avenues for further research into TNPs. First, membership in EFA provides benefits to members, namely: legitimacy, policy internationalization, solidarity, and capacity building. Second, the process of information exchange described in this thesis also stimulates two processes that are related to, but distinct from, learning: collaboration and emulation.

(1) Legitimacy

For many smaller parties, one benefit of being in EFA is legitimacy. Many of EFA's member parties are marginal in their domestic political systems. For these smaller parties, "European cooperation often allows for party influence beyond the sum of its parts and can also help parties achieve political legitimacy" (Lightfoot, 2006: 305).

One staff member of EFA explained that some new EFA member parties were drawn to the transnational party even before they became political parties.

They “came to talk us when they were a devolution movement…they said, maybe we should turn our movement into a party and with the European elections are upcoming, maybe we should participate in the European elections” (Interview 10). European politics provides a space for parties to legitimize themselves as electoral actors. A member of the Frisian National Party explained that EFA helps combat opposition claims that “you are so small, you can’t do that” (Interview 5). One UDB respondent explained: “It’s a way to show, even if we don’t have elected members, that we participate in European affairs and remain informed” (Interview 20).

Attendance at EFA partners’ events can also provide legitimacy. For example, a large delegation from the Frisian National Party attended the 2014 Scottish referendum. One provincial councillor explained: “It’s important for the FNP’s image because then we don’t get viewed as a party that’s only active in Friesland. We are, in fact, very internationally active” (Interview 4). After the referendum, the FNP noted that “publicity about the trip reached nearly all Frisian and Dutch media” including national and regional radio stations and a 3-day ‘walkalong’ by the national newspaper *de Volkskrant.*

However, for more electorally successful member parties, there are fears that EFA may serve as a delegitimizing space. One member of ERC noted that they would prefer to join a TNP with mainstream, “normalised parties” (Interview 30). An SNP respondent noted that they took care to vet other European parties before arranging meetings. They explained that these parties sought legitimacy from the SNP: “A lot of parties that may be more nationalist in the bad way will say, we’ll go to Scotland…you get these random emails and you think, you’re not our type of nationalist” (Interview 49). Legitimacy is for some a benefit of EFA networking and for others a disincentive, depending on the position of the member party.

(2) Policy Internationalization

Policy internationalization is a strategy that political parties employ to project domestic policy onto the international level and emphasize the international dimension at the domestic level. The projection of autonomist politics onto the international stage is a particularly important issue for EFA members. After all, there is a logical link between the fight for independence and gaining international recognition for that independence. Nationalist politicians must focus on "obtain[ing] international visibility, recognition and support regarding the legitimacy of its objectives" (Guibernau, 2013: 372).

EFA member parties use the TNP to internationalize their autonomist cause and claims against the state. For example, the 2017 Catalan referendum is one of the most recent and prominent cases of policy internationalization in EFA. During my 2016 and 2017 fieldwork in Catalonia, it was clear that external legitimacy of the referendum was crucially important to Catalan independentists. They sought international observers and subsequently 110 EFA observers attended in October 2017. Furthermore, in September 2018, a group of 17 MEPs visited the Catalan political prisoners as did 3 SNP MPs. These visits were facilitated by prominent members of EFA. EFA MEPs also coordinated an action in the European Parliament in which MEPs wore yellow shirts to protest inaction by the EU and the behaviour of the Spanish Government.

One Catalan MEP explained that EFA "brings us specific benefits because EFA gets money from the European Commission and that allows us to co-fund for example different activities here in Catalonia or elsewhere" (Interview 25). The European Free Alliance provides scope for the internationalization of regionalists' agendas by using European funding, pooled resources, and communication platforms to draw attention to parties' political struggles. In the official wrap-up of the 2018 General Assembly, EFA put out a press release in which more than half of the words were specifically aimed at raising the Catalan

issue. They called for “all European democratic forces to mobilise for the liberation of all Catalan political prisoners” (EFA, April 2018).

EFA and EFA member parties’ attempts to seek recognition through the European Union can be seen as stretching back to the days of the ‘Europe of the Regions’ idea. For example, Keating uses the example of the Catalan Government, which during the 1992 Olympics “placed advertisements in English speaking newspapers asking rhetorically 'Where is Barcelona?' The text corrected readers' assumption that it was merely in Spain, by explaining that it was in a distinct nation called Catalonia” (1999: 5). While the dream of a refigured ‘Europe of the Regions’ has dissipated, EFA’s member parties continue to seek international attention and internationalize their autonomist policies, in some cases through the TNP.

(3) Solidarity

While the party learning process has sought to trace the information exchange between parties, there is a more intangible object of exchange as well: solidarity. Relationships with other EFA member parties provide emotional support and solidarity. This is particularly important for EFA’s smaller member parties, who receive less support and have fewer resources locally. As one member of the UDB said:

> “When you go to an [EFA] meeting, when you meet people, it is a big inspiration, because for them it’s normal to be in favour of autonomy. In France, it’s really hard. It’s a very marginal idea” (Interview 18).

Another UDB member explained, “I think that it [EFA] gives me a sense of weight” (Interview 19). Solidarity underpins the efforts that parties make for one another, which often take significant amounts of time and resources for parties. When discussing the FNP’s visit to the Scottish referendum, one participant explained, “It’s a sort of solidarity, that exists in all of EFA, that you help each other. You recognise each other’s positions…you know that if you help each

other then other parties also progress. So, it's helping others but also getting inspired" (Interview 4).

Earlier in this thesis, I told the story of Flemish MEP Maurits Coppetiers who said in a speech to Corsican autonomists: "I will be your MEP." Multiple respondents referred to this moment as a fundamental part of EFA's ethos. One explained: "That has become an incredible drive because it's so cooked into our DNA" (Interview 10). Solidarity is politically useful, explained one staff member of EFA. The consolidation of regionalists' voices and concerns are seen as essential to EFA members, because "between 80 and 100 million citizens in Europe who are not really represented in the European project, whose voice is unheard" (Interview 11). EFA's 'DNA' of solidarity encourages interactions between member parties. It provides a positive, if difficult to measure, outcome for regionalist and nationalist movements involved in transnational networking.

(4) Party Capacity Building

At a transnational level, the European Free Alliance provides support for parties to build their capacity by providing staffing and organisational support. One way to build regionalist parties' capacity is by encouraging member parties' members to work in EFAy, the EP Group, or secretariat. The secretariat also employs an intern for 3-6 months from an EFA member party; they seek to employ individuals from as many different parties as possible. These opportunities lead to 'career building' for individuals and conversely, ensure that EFA staff have close links to active individuals in member parties as those parties evolve (Interview 10). Former staff of EFA often remain in EU circles, working on regional issues and empowerment.

Capacity building may also come in the form of organisational and communications support for smaller parties. A member of the EFA bureau

explained that EFA's support can be particularly helpful for its smaller member parties. He explained:

> "EFA as a party tries to be useful for every of the forty-something members, regardless if they are small or they are bigger. For small parties, for example there was recently a delegation of the EFA bureau in Greece where we have a party representing the Turkish minority in Greece…we also help them in organising events, in organising conferences" (Interview 25).

Party capacity building may also help parties support their stances on European Union issues. For example, by connecting small parties to Brussels, EFA staff felt: "We do have an effect on our parties to see the larger European picture, although Europe has been in crisis since 1999" (Interview 10). Lynch and DeWinter noted EFA's role in supporting party capacity building. They wrote in 2008:

> "One of the defining characteristics of the EFA since its inception has been its involvement in party-building and alliance construction. The EFA staff in Brussels, and the Volksunie MEPs in particular, were active in assisting small minority nationalist parties to develop their policies, organizations and electoral capacities" (Lynch and DeWinter, 2008: 590).

For smaller member parties, EFA partners provide advice and inspiration. One FNP staff member explained that EFA's evolving professionalism in its branding and communications inspired further professionalization for him in Friesland (Interview Six). During my observations, it was clear that the central organisational bodies of EFA focused time on smaller parties and their members. EFA's secretariat staff emphasized the importance of vetting in EFA, as a way of encouraging parties to meet fundamental standards for professionalism.

(5) Emulation

As noted in Chapter Six, emulation is a different phenomenon from the learning proposed at the beginning of this thesis. Emulation is more the about “a search for credibility, status or simple conformity with international trends” (Meseguer, 2005: 73). I proposed that a party learning process would be triggered by interaction and rooted in information exchange. I adopted the term learning in order to emphasize the agential nature of information exchange. Emulation does not meet these criteria. It tends to be disembodied, with a focus on symbolic use of information rather than complex information processing.

Emulation reflects a process of imitation. Imitation “involves copying the actions of another” as if in a black box rather than adapting the policies to a local context (Shipan and Volden, 2008: 842). As such, imitation uses bounded rationality because “mimicry of policy or the imposition of policy lessons provides less scope for learning or the development of consensual knowledge” (Stone, 2000: 551). Bounded learning and emulation are thus overlapping processes that share an interest in the symbolic rather than informative value of transnational information (Meseguer and Gilardi, 2009: 531-532). I would argue that emulation is a *type* of learning that can coincide with more complex types of learning.

In the cases of the SNP and ERC’s use of the Nordic model, in particular, it is possible to see the adoption of Nordic/Scandinavian examples as conformity to international standards. Nordic welfare policies are widely believed by politicians on the left to be ‘A Good Thing’ (Newby, 2009: 323).). The source and motivation for policy learning is not a policy problem, but rather a reputational motivation that seeks to attach the party to that perceived ‘good thing’ and perceived ‘good’ government. As the SNP case showed, emulative instances can also be tied to deeper cases of learning. For example, the SNP’s communication with Norway on renewable energy shows a search and exchange of information, but other cases and uses of the Norwegian example show a shallower reference to the ‘good’ Nordic model. Emulation is clearly

related to processes of learning, but it should be highlighted as a distinct phenomenon.

(6) Collaboration

In some cases, parties took a collaborative approach to EFA. For example, the FNP organised and funded their sustainable energy project alongside EFA and sought to bring other EFA parties on board. Members of the UDB worked with ideologically aligned parties. They used these ideological similarities to drive collaborative action. For example, alongside other left wing French EFA members they called for the suspension of a number of right wing Italian EFA member parties. These parties thus take a more activist approach to the EFA network. That activist, collaborative approach occurs when parties seek to work alongside and *together* with other parties.

One UDB member, for example, called for more collaborative action in the form of joint communications. The respondent explained:

> "My objective is to do that, to make European movements a real European movement--not only two parties who speak to each other but two parties who speak together. It's not the same thing. I think it would be a really important European way to think" (Interview 21).

Such collaborative communication does occasionally occur, sometimes facilitated through EFA. For example, the UDB put out a joint press release with Plaid Cymru MEP Leanne Wood on minority language rights (UDB PR, 12/05/17). Collaboration differs from learning because it requires working together towards a shared goal. Learning, on the other hand, is a more 'give' and 'take' relationship between parties.

The process of collaboration may engender learning, because it requires significant amounts of information exchange. However, it is not synonymous with or directly causal to party political learning. Collaboration is: "a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their

relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together" (Thomson et al, 2009: 25).

In some cases, the European Free Alliance resembles a collaborative organisation. EFA is increasingly seeking to develop joint policies, for example on issues like environmental sustainability. As one EFA staff member argued, "We're not just a one issue political party. Peace has been always a key element--in all its dimensions. And, a social agenda and an environmental agenda have always been key and of course linguistic diversity and cultural diversity" (Interview 10).

However, in this thesis, studying the relationships between individual EFA member parties, I have also seen ways that collaboration is difficult. The FNP, for example, reported that they found it difficult to get other parties to fund the sustainable energy project. Collaboration thus may be a goal of some EFA parties, but it is not clear how this becomes funded or formalized. Rather than a collaborative effort, the sustainable energy project was driven by the FNP and funded by Frisian means. As such, it ultimately became a 'best-practice sharing' activity rather than a collaborative research project.

In Chapter One, I reviewed existing typologies of transnational political parties. These analyses tended to typologize TNPs as progressing along a spectrum of 'integration' from the most inter-governmental to the most supranational. Hanley summarized these studies and noted that, "parties can go from a stage of minimal contact to various degrees of active co-operation (roughly where most TNP are today)" (2008: 20). Collaboration seems to move one step beyond active co-operation and indicate co-creation of policy and strategy platforms. In further studies, it may be useful to consider collaborative projects in EFA and the extent to which this can be seen as an effort to 'progress' or integrate the TNP further.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This research began from personal experience and scholarly curiosity. My observations of transnational cooperation during the Scottish independence referendum spurred my interest in transnational interactions between nationalist and regionalist political parties. Academically, this thesis builds on my previous research into nationalist and regionalists' pro-Europeanism and the relationship between the SNP and Plaid Cymru. It closely relates to the significant scholarship conducted at the University of Edinburgh, and in the UK more widely, on the 'Europe of the Regions' idea (and its end). These lines of inquiry led me to the limited literature on transnational political parties and the more developed work on political and organisational learning. Ultimately, I asked: do interactions between regionalist and nationalist parties in the European Free Alliance generate member party learning? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

In the four cases studied in this thesis, I found multiple instances of learning between EFA member parties. Parties learned from the EFA members they perceived as more successful. Learning occurred most often on electoral or autonomist strategies. For more powerful nationalist parties, learning tended to come not from other EFA parties, but from other governments. In most cases, transnational learning occurred alongside other factors driving party change.

The cases allowed me to test a theoretical framework for studying party learning in the transnational political party network. The comparison between the cases allowed me to explore variation in party's experiences of learning and EFA. The contextual factors of electoral success, institutional access, and issue contestation particularly affected what was learned and from where parties sought lessons. Further similarities and differences in party learning processes were reviewed in Chapter Eight.

In this chapter, I briefly review the findings of this thesis. I then touch on the limitations of this research, both methodologically and theoretically. I also propose three routes for further research: a number of useful further empirical applications, a closer look into para-diplomatic learning, and re-incorporating the transnational level into the party learning framework. Finally, I conclude this thesis by re-contextualizing its findings.

9.1 Summary of Findings

Chapter Eight reflected in detail on how the empirical chapters reflected on the party learning framework, its attendant contextual factors, and other related processes that occur within transnational political parties (such as collaboration, capacity building, and the search for legitimacy). To conclude and draw together these findings, in this section, I will briefly highlight the key findings of the thesis.

Empirically, I found some cases of learning in the political parties studied. Cases of learning are predominantly centered on strategic behaviours. The FNP and UDB sought to implement electoral strategies that they had observed in other parties (especially the SNP): running in national elections and canvassing, respectively. Other lessons included the use of a 'feasibility' framing for autonomy (the UDB), the application of a 'Nordic Model' on social welfare and social democratic framing (the SNP, ERC), and more technocratic information about sustainable energy (the FNP). It is clear that, in the four cases studied, party learning affects a shallower, strategic or technical level of party decision making.

I also found that party learning is hindered under two main conditions: (1) when parties see no successful *and* feasible example and (2) when parties are preoccupied with internal matters. The first of these conditions holds true for the SNP and the UDB. For the SNP, no sub-state nationalist parties were perceived as sufficiently successful to learn from. Even the Parti Quebecois

was seen as having made significant policy mistakes, which engendered some 'negative learning.' For the UDB, on the other hand, many *successful* examples were identified by party elites. These were encompassed in some points of learning such as the promotion of autonomist policies using the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly as exemplary. However, the UDB was hindered in learning further policies from abroad due to their 'feeling of falling behind' which made it difficult for party members to see the *feasibility* of these policies for Brittany.

Parties' also struggled to initiate or make collective learning processes when internal politics were more salient. This was particularly noticeable in ERC, which during the time of data collection (2016 and 2017) was preparing for the Catalan independence referendum. These preparations and ERC's coalition with their counterpart PDeCAT meant that a united approach to independence took precedence over the search for and application of new policies or strategies. The pressures of internal politics were also relevant in the FNP. FNP elites are engaged in a conversation about the nature and purpose of the party. Internal disagreements halted implementation of learning on national elections.

Finally, the grounded and contextualized nature of my inquiry allowed me to develop an understanding of the *other* consequences of transnational networking in the four parties studied. Parties with governing responsibility tended to use these institutions to seek and adapt information from abroad, for example. Smaller, non-governing parties saw transnational networks as potential for other types of activities (particularly symbolic) that might help to increase their legitimacy, exposure, and capacity at the local level.

These empirical discoveries allowed me to consider how useful my theoretical framework is for understanding transnational party networking. I found that the three stages of party learning were helpful tools in identifying the movement of information between sub-state nationalist and regionalist political parties.

However, the framework requires more elaboration on the concept of learning 'implementation,' which was difficult to operationalize. Furthermore, it would be useful to dig more deeply into patterns of information interpretation. The negotiation around differing interpretations of information that occur when shifting learning from the individual to the collective level were a crucial part of the party learning process.

Three contextual factors emerged as very relevant in shaping party learning processes: electoral success, governing responsibility, and issue contestation. These contextual factors conditioned which parties were seen as exemplary, the resources that parties' had to network internationally, and the policy areas that were the center of information seeking abroad. Key individual entrepreneurs and the level of party decision making centralization proved relevant to the party learning process. However, these factors require more precise definition and more focused empirical applications in order to better determine the way that they impact learning.

Overall, these modest findings of learning highlight a perspective on transnational political parties which is often overlooked. In the EU literature, TNPs are seen as bodies that contribute to and are part of a European integration process. In literature by scholars of political parties, TNPs are often derided as less than full political parties. This thesis has moved beyond discussions of TNP's reality or integration to consider its effect on its constituent political parties. Taking the TNP, specifically the European Free Alliance, as a networked body of domestic political parties, I have traced how information about political parties' policies and strategies influences other parties' decision making. As emphasized in previous chapters, these influences are complementary to other drivers of party behaviour. However, the study of this phenomenon, which I have termed 'political party learning' elucidates a significant effect of the TNP and an interesting transnational dynamic affecting domestic political parties. In the next sections, I consider how

this specific study of this phenomenon is limited and how further research might improve upon our understanding of it.

9.2 Limitations of Research

Like any scholarly work, this research required compromises in terms of the research design. By the nature of the exercise, I focused on certain dynamics at the expense of others. Methodologically, the research is limited by inherent concerns about interview data (addressed in Chapter Two), the limitations of documentary data, and the problem of overdetermination. Theoretically, like most studies of learning, the party learning framework suffers from a lack of parsimony. Furthermore, I consider the missing component of time in the party learning framework.

(1) Methodological

Chapter Two proposed three sources of data: elite interviews, ethnographic observations, and party documents. The emphasis throughout the thesis has been on interviews which provide elites' accounts of their experiences of transnational relationships and party decision making. These accounts and my interview strategy sought to trace information from its source to its effect on domestic parties. However, as noted in Chapter Two, there are two issues with interview data: (1) the reliability of the respondent and (2) the ability to ascertain 'truth' from interviews.

I noted that a solution to the 'dishonest respondent' issue would be to interview a wide range and appropriate number of respondents. Inevitably, in the case studies, there are relevant elites who are not interviewed. This is a result of not only the time constraints of a PhD but those of politicians themselves, especially those who hold governing positions.

There is also a limitation in terms of the interview sample size. I sought to achieve saturation, defined as "the point at which there are fewer surprises and there are no more emergent patterns in the data" (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012:

192). However, the concept of saturation is necessarily vague. I felt that saturation was reached in each case, because stable patterns of discussion emerged. However, given the complexity of the concepts discussed (relationships to EFA, to the EU, other European states, and internal decision making), it is difficult to know when saturation is truly reached.

Interviews were also affected by two major political developments: Brexit and the 2017 Catalan referendum. These events not only constrained politician's time, but also directed the attention of interviews. This was particularly the case for Catalan respondents; interviews were conducted in the two summers leading up to the 2017 vote. However, the Catalan referendum also allowed me to explore how the goal of independence can dominate transnational relationships. I found that the uniting event of the Catalan independence referendum focused Catalan independentist parties' attention on achieving international recognition.

Another issue with data in this thesis is the utility, or more accurately the lack thereof, of documentary information. Documents were used to triangulate information found through interviews and observations. However, in most cases, documentary data did not provide enough detail to trace the movement of information. Party documents do not always indicate the *source* of inspiration.

In cases where they do, it is not possible to make a claim of learning from these references. References to transnational examples in documents could be post-hoc or signs of emulation or diffusion rather than agential learning. This is a well-established problem in learning theories. As Radaelli and Dunlop (2013: 923) emphasize: "Measurement is also difficult in this field: how do we know that what we observe is learning and not something else?" In order to identify that learning has caused change, it is not sufficient to simply identify where party policy/strategy became similar to policy/strategy of other parties. It is

necessary to understand the *reasoning* and informational process underpinning parties' choices.

Such reasoning is often not documented, particularly in political parties. Parties do not publicly document their rationale behind strategic decisions, which proved to be a common area of learning between EFA members. Given these issues, this thesis limits its use of documentary data. To make better use of documents in further studies of party learning, a researcher would need to follow a more rigid process-tracing method within a more contained, less explorative case study.

Finally, in this thesis, the research design faced the common issue of having too many variables (five contextual factors) and too few cases. This issue means that it is difficult to discern the effect of each variable. Due to the numerous dimensions of variation between cases, differences in party learning processes can be explained by numerous factors. This problem of "overdetermination" is common in comparative research (Lijphart, 1971; Faure, 1979).

As I noted in Chapter Eight, there were significant patterns of interaction between the contextual factors (party centralization and issue contestation, electoral success and governing responsibility) which made it impossible to conclude the extent to which contextual factors individually affect the learning outcomes. The different contextual factors introduced in this thesis should be isolated in further comparative studies and the interactions between contextual factors could be explored by application to further cases.

(2) Theoretical

Theoretically, by attempting to understand and partially explain party strategy and policy decisions, the study of learning falls into the trap of many policy approaches. Policy theories resists the traditional tests of a theory, i.e. "to design crucial tests that can determine if theory A fits the data better than theory

B" (Meier, 2009: 6). Policy theories are not easily pitted against one another in this way. They often address different stages of the policy process, different dimensions of policy (discourse, framing, adoption, implementation, success), and thus, multiple theoretical approaches may help explain the same choice.

This is further complicated in a multi-level framework such as this one which considers the interconnections between supranational and sub-state actors. The parsimony of the theory is challenged only further by the inter-disciplinary nature of the learning approach I have adopted. I drew on sociological, psychological, policy, and political science approaches to the concept of learning. The party learning framework thus lacks the simplicity one would ideally achieve when developing or applying theory.

This study has also neglected the *time* dimension of learning. Theoretically, learning, by virtue of being a process, requires a change over time. This thesis has considered the contemporary relationships between political parties in Europe. Rather than delineating a specific time period, I allowed interview respondents to reveal the policy areas and time periods that were relevant to the study. As such, time periods covered in the identified instances of learning varied. For example, FNP learning from the SNP was accelerated by their interest in and observation of the 2014 independence referendum. Alternately, the relationship between Quebec and Scotland has been a more sustained place for information exchange, with the Scots seeking information on Quebec's referendum and vice versa over the span of 20 years.

Scholars have argued that the time dimension of learning has often been "underestimated" and that this underestimation may lead to overstated claims of non-learning or arrested learning (Zito and Schout, 2009: 1119). The underpinning claim is that learning can take a significant amount of time and that learning studies should recognize this. However, tracing cases over extended periods of time may make it even more difficult to determine causality

and to argue that learning truly happened (Dussauge-Laguna, 2012: 582). Nonetheless, incorporating the time dimension would allow for exploration of new dimensions of party learning, answering questions such as "'when', 'for how long' or 'in what sequence'" the party learning process occurs (Dussauge-Laguna, 2012: 568).

9.3 Avenues for Further Research

The findings identified in this thesis have allowed me to refine my understanding of party learning. They also allow me to identify further areas of research. The framework would particularly be strengthened by application to further case studies, exploration of the relationship between parties and para-diplomacy, and reintroduction of the transnational level.

(1) Further Case Studies

This study was a preliminary use of the party learning framework. As indicated in Chapter Eight, the theoretical framework could be expanded and refined. As such, I propose three further empirical tests of the framework: an application to radical right parties, to intra-state regionalist relationships, and a single case study.

Studies of transnational parties have previously considered the relationships between radical right parties in Europe. These parties provide a promising case study for future application of the party learning framework. They are often excluded from domestic government, and likely to seek transnational relationships through more informal means, similar to small regionalist parties. Rydgren (2004, 2005) has studied information exchange between radical right wing parties in Europe. He argued that the cross national diffusion of a 'master frame' can partly explain the emergence of radical right parties.

Interestingly, radical right parties are less likely to coalesce in the European Parliament due to the strategic incentive to be distant from other 'pariah' parties

(Ennser, 2012: 167-168). Given their struggles with creating a radical right TNP, the relationships between radical right parties might thus allow for an interesting exploration of the role of the transnational political party in information exchange.

As I touched on in the case studies, EFA parties also create and take part in intra-state regionalist organisations or coalitions. In France, parties come together in *Regions et Peuples Solidaires.* In the Netherlands, parties coalesce legislatively in the *Onafhankelijke Senaatsfractie.* In Spain, parties regularly work together in electoral coalitions for the European Parliament.

This thesis specifically selected cases that were active in different states. However, parties regularly reported close relationships with other regionalists in their own state (for example, Plaid Cymru and the SNP; ERC and the Basque Eusko Alkartasuna; the UDB and Corsican parties). Intra-state party coalitions and organisations suit the pre-conditions of the party learning framework because they engender significant interactions between non-electorally competing political parties. By controlling for country-specific factors, it may be easier to explore the effect of contextual factors on party learning.

Finally, I would argue that a useful further empirical application of the party learning framework would be studying a single case study over a longer period of time. Comparison within a single party could explore the time dimension, the different roles of individuals, and the likelihood of learning in different policy areas. It would allow the researcher to focus on within-party change and variation and. Single case studies have also been tied to more in-depth process tracing, which could allow the researcher to explore the usefulness of documents in identifying party learning (Bennett and Elman, 2008).

(2) Disentangling Party Relationships and Para-Diplomacy

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, I explored and emphasized the way that more powerful EFA member parties use their roles in government and their

para-diplomatic institutions to seek transnational information. This leads to different patterns of party learning, because information flows from other governments and governmental research to the political party. This information affects the party level, for example, through the experiences of prominent party advisers and politicians. The empirical overlap between government and party learning processes reflects the disciplinary overlap between scholars of administrative policy learning and those of political learning.

Further research should seek to explore these boundaries and overlaps in learning. It is important to further disentangle the relationship between political party and government learning. This may be done by considering the effect of transnational learning in a single region. Within this single case, it would be more feasible to study the role of transnational information in governmental policy making, regionalist party policy/strategy making, and the connections between the two.

(3) Reincorporating the Transnational Level

In this thesis, I have sought to understand whether the *domestic political party* displays learning, in a transnational party context. This approach treats the European Free Alliance as a structure or venue within which party learning happens. As an organisation, EFA is seen as a 'library and communication system' rather than a body with norms, cultures, and a context of its own (Spender, 1996: 68). Focusing on the experience of the domestic political party was necessary to delineate the scope of this thesis.

However, the transnational political party as an organization itself, "can be seen as more than the sum of their individual or collective parts…it is important to consider what is involved in organizational learning at an organizational level of analysis" (Vince, 2001: 1330). To bring this organisational level back into the research, it is important to return to the initial theoretical framework. In

particular, at the transnational inter-organizational level there is another step of information processing: institutionalization.

Institutionalization is one of possible process that can be generated from the introduction of new knowledge into the TNP. When knowledge is institutionalized, it engenders ‘standard operating procedures.’ These procedures “give stability to shared causal belief, they set up structures of meaning, they create networks of actors, they constrain the perception of interests” (Radaelli, 1995: 178).

Shared norms or ways of thinking and structures within the EFA network emerged in this thesis. For example, EFA fosters a shared norm linking sustainable energy projects and regionalism/nationalism which then facilitate cooperation on this issue. EFA staff and events also emphasize a shared understanding of the meaning of certain concepts, in particular the idea of ‘self-determination.’ The creation of meaning and procedures in EFA might condition parties’ behaviours and engender or constrain further learning. Further research may wish to explore the process of institutionalization of lessons and norms in EFA.

Another way to bring the transnational level back into the analysis would be to study the European Free Alliance in a wider context. This research has largely emphasized the *contemporary* European Free Alliance. Kaiser (2009, 2010) has advocated for an approach to networks in the European Union which ‘brings history back in.’ The historical approach would allow for a deeper understanding of EFA’s network creation, growth, and closure in order to add nuance.

Table 9.1 Party Learning in the Transnational Party Network

Actor	Stage of Learning	Output
Individual	Information Acquisition	New piece of information retained.
	Interpretation	Integration of information into own beliefs/context.
Party	Collective Interpretation	Shared understanding of information and its meaning in party context.
	Implementation	Change of behaviour/belief.
Transnational Party	Institutionalization	Routinization of member parties' learning through TNP behaviours, policies, and norms/values.

A historical approach could "act as a crucial corrective for any largely misplaced enthusiasm about the *discovery* of novel forms of politics and policy-making in the EU polity" (Kaiser, 2009: 237, emphasis added). That is, it is often easy or tempting to claim that networked governance in Europe is a new phenomenon. As I have alluded to throughout this thesis, trans-nationalist nationalism is far from new, but this could be further and more clearly substantiated.

9.4 Conclusion

In this chapter and the last, I reflected on my theoretical and methodological approach in light of the cases studied. I will now briefly re-contextualize the political party learning approach and my findings in a wider perspective. As I addressed in the introduction, studying party learning in EFA draws together three strands of research: on regionalist and nationalist parties, on the European Union and its transnational dynamics, and on the movement of information in an interconnected political world.

(1) The Movement of Information

I found that political parties within a transnational political party structure learn from their interactions with one another. In the case of EFA, nationalists and regionalists often exchange information through an intentional, agential, and small scale process. This party learning can be seen as a part of a wider process of transnationalization, which is then tied to wider trends of European integration and globalization. Transnationalization was induced by the 'constitutionalization' of the European Union but it goes beyond the EU; it is linked to historical, economic, and cultural links between European regions, states, and societies (Kaiser and Starie, 2005).

Increasing interconnection, through information technologies and European cooperation, has been tied to the development of learning theories. In fact, a 'prompt to think seriously about learning' was the increasingly similar adoption of policies across the world in the 1960s, on issues such as welfare regimes (Freeman, 2006: 368). Freeman argued that: "Learning has quickened to the extent that living has" (2006: 368).

As political life has become increasingly interconnected, learning theories have been applied to governments, think tanks, business, and supranational organisations. Political parties have been neglected in the learning literature, despite their institutional and informal relationships across Europe. This thesis has shown that parties also take part in the phenomenon of transnationalization by highlighting how they learn and share 'best-practice' with other European parties to develop party strategies and policies.

(2) Transnational parties and the European Union

This thesis has also reflected on the nature and effect of transnational political parties. Transnational political parties (TNPs) have most often been studied as part of the European Parliament or European integration. The scholarly emphasis on TNPs in the EP will no doubt be rejuvenated with the 2019

European Parliament elections. Within these perspectives, TNPs have been judged in regard to their level of integration or the extent to which they resemble domestic parties. The TNP is tied to normative judgments and claims about how they *should* be and the extent to which they *matter.* The discussion has sometimes gone on to discuss whether transnational parties are 'real' parties or not.

I have sought to move beyond this discussion on TNPs, which over-emphasizes the symbolic meaning of transnational political parties. Rather, this thesis has focused on the specific effect that TNPs have on domestic politics. I have shown that EFA, as a transnational political party, developed a complex and dense range of connections between its member parties. These connections occur in physical spaces (the EP, General Assemblies, meetings in regions), virtual spaces (Twitter, email, Facebook), informally and formally, multilaterally and bilaterally.

Although it is hard to pinpoint the TNP's specific role in each interaction, EFA creates an *arena* for transnational party learning. Learning between member parties is one way that TNPs have affected the domestic level. Information from TNP partners affects politicians' calculations as they make decisions, albeit alongside a range of other causal factors such as inter-party competition and intra-party conflict.

As such, this thesis plays one part in showing how TNP membership *does* matter. As Van Hecke argued: "A small impact on a very important process could generate major consequences" (2010: 407). The effect of transnational political parties on domestic politics has often been understated and neglected, but it is clear that for some parties the transnational interactions engendered by TNP provide both information and inspiration.

(3) Regionalist and Nationalist Party Politics

Finally, this thesis reflects on the day-to-day transnational relationships between Europe's nationalist and regionalist political parties. An extensive body of literature already existed studying the internationalism of regionalists and nationalists. This was most compellingly organised around a prospect of the "Europe of the Regions" in the 1990s. The Europe of the Regions did not materialize and regional participation in the EU's supranational institutions remains limited. However, the apparent failure of the Europe of the Regions concept does not mean that the region is no longer relevant to European politics. In fact, "there are numerous ways in which the EU remains highly important for regions, and in which regional politics plays a significant role in shaping the nature and direction of European integration" (Elias, 2008: 487). This thesis explored one way that the EU remains influential in regional politics: through the transnational relationships engendered by EFA.

Empirically, the referenda in Scotland and Catalonia in recent years have drawn attention to the role and impact of regional politics on European politics. The interconnection between European integration and regionalist party politics has only been made more visible by the SNP's European outreach on Brexit and Catalan nationalists' attempts to internationalize the issue of Catalan politicians' imprisonment.

This thesis has explored regionalist and nationalist political parties at an individual level, considering the way that individuals process and negotiate information, and at a party level, exploring the way that party decision making employs transnational information. It has situated that process of information exchange within a broader transnational context of European integration and transnational activism. By comparing four EFA member parties to one another, a wider political phenomenon of political party learning in the European Free Alliance has emerged. The concept of political party learning in a European context and the findings of regionalist and nationalist learning provide fruitful routes for research going forward.

Appendix One: List of Interview Respondents

Interviews were conducted over the course of this research in Scotland, Catalonia, Brittany, Friesland and Brussels. Fieldwork was conducted intermittently from May 2016 to November 2018.

Frisian National Party

- Wolter Jetten, FNP Jongerein member, interview conducted via phone in May 2016.
- Lyda Veldstra, Leeuwarden City Council member, interview conducted in Leeuwarden, Friesland, June 2016.
- Johannes Kramer, Provincial Executive member, interview conducted in Leeuwarden, Friesland in June 2016.
- Sybren Posthumus, Provincial Councillor, interview conducted in Leeuwarden, Friesland in June 2016.
- Cees Nieboer, Chair of the EFA Commission, interview conducted in Sneek, Friesland in October 2016.
- Yde Dijkstra, Provincial Group staff, interview conducted in Leeuwarden, Friesland in October 2016.
- Wietske Poelman, Provincial Group staff, interview conducted in Leeuwarden, Friesland in October 2016.
- Johannes Elzinga, member EFA Commission, interview conducted in Franeker, Friesland in October 2016.
- Olrik Bouma, member EFA Commission, Vice President of EFA, interview conducted in Brussels, Belgium in April 2017.

Union Démocratique Bretonne

- Aurélien Boulé, staff, interview conducted in Nantes, Brittany in February 2017.
- Pierre-Emmanuel Marais, Nantes City Councillor, interview conducted in Nantes, Brittany in February 2017.
- Victor Gallou, Bureau Member (Head of International Affairs), interview conducted in Lorient, Brittany in February 2017.
- Jean-Christophe Cordaillat-Dallara, Head of International Affairs for UDB Jeunes and Bureau Member, interview conducted in Auray, Brittany in February 2017.
- Loïc Cheval, legislative candidate, interview conducted in Auray, Brittany in February 2017.
- Laurence Dumas, Bureau Member, interview conducted in Auray, Brittany in February 2017.

- Stuart Lesvier, Spokesperson of UDB Jeunes, interview conducted in Rennes, Brittany in February 2017.
- Trefina Kerrain, Bureau Member (Head of Political Education), interview conducted in Rennes, Brittany in February 2017.
- Nil Caouissin, Spokesperson, interview conducted in Rennes, Brittany in February 2017.
- Gaël Briand, Editor of *Le Peuple Breton* and Bureau Member, interview conducted in Rennes, Brittany in February 2017.

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

- Ferran Civit, Member of the Catalan Parliament, External Affairs Committee, ERC National Council, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in July 2016.
- Jordi Sole, MEP and former Minister for Europe, EFA President, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in July 2016.
- Anna Simó i Castelló, Member of the Catalan Parliament and former ERC Parliamentary Spokesperson, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Adriana Delgado i Herreros, Member of the Catalan Parliament, External Affairs Committee, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Pau Morales, Leader of JERC, Mayor (Dalt), interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Marta Rosique, International Affairs Chair of JERC, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Isidre Sala, President of the ERC International Relations Commission, Catalan Government Director of Multilateral Affairs, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Jordi Vilanova i Karlsson, Spokesperson of the ERC International Relations Commission, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- David Rodríguez i González, Member of the Catalan Parliament, External Affairs Committee, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia, in June 2017.

PDeCAT

- Xavier Trias, Barcelona City Councillor, former Mayor of Barcelona, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in July 2016.

- Albert Batalla Siscart, Member of the Catalan Parliament, Junts pel Si Spokesperson, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in July 2016.
- Lluis Corominas i Díaz, Member of the Catalan Parliament, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017
- Jordi-Miquel Sendra I Vellvè, Member of the Catalan Parliament, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Alistair Spearing-Ortiz, Head of European Relations, Joventut Nacionalista, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.

Scottish National Party

- Luke Skipper, former Chief of Staff to SNP Westminster Group, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in June 2016.
- David McDonald, Glasgow City Councillor, founder of SNP Friends of Catalonia, interviewed in Glasgow, Scotland in October 2016.
- Zoe Dingwall, Policy Adviser to SNP MEPs on Brexit and the Economy, interviewed in Brussels, Belgium in April 2017.
- Paul Robertson, former Head of Research in the SNP Westminster Group, interviewed in London, England in January 2018.
- Mairi Gougeon, MSP and former representative on the Committee of the Regions, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in February 2018.
- Christina McKelvie, MSP and representative on the Council of Europe, former Convenor of the Committee on Europe and External Relations, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in February 2018.
- Rhiannon Spear, Glasgow City Councillor, former Head of Young Scots for Independence, interviewed in Glasgow, Scotland in March 2018.
- Emilie-Louise Purdie, Head of Research in the SNP Westminster Group, interviewed in London, England in March 2018.
- Oriol Roig, head of ANC Scotland, member of JERC and SNP Youth, interviewed in Glasgow, Scotland in April 2018.
- Liz Lloyd, Chief of Staff to the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, intervieawed in Edinburgh, Scotland in August 2018.
- Linda Fabiani, MSP, Deputy Presiding Officer, former Minister for Europe, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in October 2018.
- Ian McCann, SNP Corporate Governance and Compliance Officer, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in November 2018.
- Kevin Pringle, Former Special Adviser to the First Minister (Alex Salmond), former Strategic Communications Director of the SNP, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in November 2018.

European Free Alliance

- Gunther Dauwen, Director of the European Free Alliance, interviewed in Brussels, Belgium in April 2017.
- Eva Bidania, Political Advisor to the European Free Alliance, interviewed in Brussels, Belgium in April 2017.
- Roccu Garoboy, EFA EP Group Adviser on Budget Control and former Vice President of EFA Youth, interviewed in Brussels, Belgium in April 2017.

Civil Society

- Miquel Strubell, founding member, ANC, interviewed in Barcelona, Catalonia in May 2017.
- Xavier Rubio-Campillo, ANC Scotland, interviewed in Edinburgh, Scotland in April 2018.
- Michael Gray, journalist and former member of National Collective, interviewed in October 2018.

Appendix Two: List of EFA Member Parties

Full Member Parties of the European Free Alliance

Party Name	**Abbreviation**	**Region (State)**
Ålands Framtid	AF	Åland (Finland)
Autonomie, Liberté, Participation, Écologie*	ALPE	Aosta Valley (Italy)
Bayernpartei	-	Bavaria (Germany)
Bloc Nacionalista Valencia	BLOC	Valencia (Spain)
Bloque Nacionalista Gallego	BNG	Galicia (Spain)
Eusko Alkartasuna	EA	Basque Country (Spain)
Enotna Lista	EL	Carinthia (Slovenia)
Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt	EMNP	Transylvania/ Szeklerland (Romania)
Esquerra Republicana de Cataunya	ERC	Catalonia (Spain)
Fryske Nasjonale Partij	FNP	Friesland (Netherlands)
Inseme per a Corsica	-	Corsica (France)
Lausitzer Allianz	LA	Lusatia (Germany)
Lista za Rijeku	-	Rijeka (Croatia)
Liga Veneta Repubblica	LVR	Veneto (Italy)
Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Szövetség	MKDSZ	Hungarian minority (Slovakia)
Mebyon Kernow	MK	Cornwall (UK)
Moravané	-	Moravia (Czech Republic)

Mouvement Région Savoie	MRS	Savoy (France)
Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	N-VA	Flanders (Belgium)
Omo Ilinden Pirin	OMO	Macedonian minority (Bulgaria)
Partit Occitan	POc	Occitania (France)
Plaid Cymru	PC	Wales (UK)
Partitu di a Nazione Corsa	PNC	Corsica (France)
Partito Sardo d'Azione*	PSd'Az	Sardinia (Italy)
Federació PSM-Entesa Nacionlista	PSM-Entesa	Balearic Islands (Spain)
Rainbow	-	Macedonian minority (Greece)
Ruch Autonomii Śląska	RAŚ	Silesia (Poland)
Slovenska Skupnost	SSK	Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy)
Scottish National Party	SNP	Scotland (UK)
Südschleswigschen Wählerverbands	SSW	Schleswig-Holstein (Germany)
Schleswig Partei	SP	North Schlewsig (Denmark)
Süd-Tiroler Freiheit	-	South Tyrol (Italy)
Union Démocratique Bretonne	UDB	Brittany (France)
Unitat Catalana	UC	Northern Catalonia (France)
Unser Land	UL	Alsace (France)
Yorkshire Party	YP	Yorkshire (UK)

*currently suspended

Observer Members of EFA

Party Name	**Abbreviation**	**Region**
Dostluk Esitlik Baris Partisi	DEB	Turkish Minority (Greece)
Kaszebsko Jednota	KJ	Kashubian minority (Poland)
Latvijas Krievu savienība	RSL	Russian minority (Latvia)
L'Altro Sud	-	Southern Italy (Italy)
Nueva Canarias	NC	Canarias (Spain)
Pro Lombardia Indipendenza*	PLI	Lombardy (Italy)
Oljka Party	-	Istria (Slovenia)
Patrie Furlane	-	Friuli (Italy)

*currently suspended

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